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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

The Literature about the Depression
1929 - 1939
in the Prairie Provinces
# of Canada

by

©

Shirley Irene Paustian

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE LITERATURE ABOUT THE DEPRESSION 1929 - 1939 IN THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES OF CANADA submitted by Shirley Irene Paustian in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the literature about the depression on the prairies, against a background of the depression literature of Britain, the United States, British Columbia and Eastern Canada. British and American literature is examined only in its bare outlines, the literature of the industrial areas of Canada given more attention, but only the literature of the Canadian prairies examined in detail.

British literature of the thirties is found to be largely political in theme. The conflict between Communism and Fascism was a basic concern of British writers, who championed the cause of the workers but found class consciousness a barrier to full association with them. Politics is less important in the literature of the United States, the emphasis in the industrial areas being rather on labour unrest, unemployment, poverty, and the disruption of home life occasioned by the failure of the economy. In the agricultural west the drought which accompanied the depression, and the economic and social problems which it caused, provide the material for the bulk of the literature. The themes which predominate in the literature of the industrial areas of Canada are much like those of American industrial areas.

Turning to the Canadian prairies we find that unemployment, transience, poverty, labour unrest and provincial politics appear as minor themes. The major themes are related to the drought rather than to economic or political problems. The psychological impact of the dust and the wind on prairie dwellers provides a major theme, as well as a backdrop for the bulk of the prairie literature. Arising from this is the second major theme: the dilemma facing the prairie farmer who was forced by the prolonged drought to reconsider his commitment to the land, and to decide whether to abandon his farm and move on in search of another Promised Land, or to remain on the prairies trusting that an early end to the drought would justify his faith in the country. Some of the literature follows the trek north to well-watered areas; some of it concentrates on the lives of those who remained behind; some of it takes the overall view. Man is seen in conflict with nature, the antagonist taking the form of wind and dust, sometimes personified as a malignant demon of awesome power, sometimes as a capricious nature god likely, at any moment, to abandon violence and restore the life-giving rain to the prairies. A significant body of literature set in post-depression times or written long after the depression takes the retrospective view.

The study concludes with a detailed examination of one poem, Anne Marriott's "The Wind Our Enemy," and five major works of fiction: *Who Has Seen the Wind*, by W.O.

Mitchell; Music at the Close, by Edward McCourt; The Words of My Roaring, by Robert Kroetsch; A Bird in the House, by Margaret Laurence; and As For Me and My House, by Sinclair Ross.

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INTRODUCTION

Western Canada is a land of exaggeration. Westerners boast of the extremes of their prairie: the land is flatter, the distances are greater, the weather is hotter and colder than in any other region; the snow is deeper, the winds are stronger, the mud is stickier and the dust is dustier. The extremes of nature are matched by the extremes of the agricultural economy of the west, which fluctuates in response to both man-made and natural laws. Prairie land, for example, varies widely in quality, but its intrinsic value has, from the beginning, had little effect in determining its economic value. The open prairie was first shunned as a barren region devoid of wood and water; later, with an almost equal lack of realism, it was viewed as millions of acres of almost equally fertile farm land ready for the plow. Land which was once given away lavishly to homesteaders, the Hudson's Bay Company, railroads, now sells (if properly located) for thousands of dollars per acre. In the spring of 1811 Lord Selkirk paid ten shillings for 116,000 sections of western land. In the summer of 1934, many prairie farmers would have said that he was overcharged.

Today's inflated price and Selkirk's undervalued one bear little relation, obviously, to the value of the land for agricultural purposes. Selkirk was granted his land as an inducement to settlement; the inflated price reflects the value of the land for urban development; only the estimate of the disgruntled farmer in the midst of the depression reflects the value of the land for agricultural purposes -- the fact that agricultural land on the prairies at that time, because of man's failure to cope with economic and natural laws which affected western agriculture, had become, at least temporarily, worthless.

This situation resulted from the general economic collapse of the thirties combined with the western drought, and the short-sighted agricultural policies which had been applied generally to the west since the beginning of settlement. Homesteaders moved into Western Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in search of free land. They came first from the United States and from eastern Canada. They were mainly people who knew something of farming in other regions, and brought to their Canadian prairie farms some basic agricultural knowledge which could be adapted to plains conditions. New varieties of wheat well suited to northern climates were developed for them by scientists,[1] and a system of summerfallowing a third of the land each year was adopted to conserve the scanty moisture. Agriculture on the dry northern plains seemed to be off to a good start.

The natural flow of land seekers was soon artificially augmented through the influence of pressure groups interested, for reasons of their own, in increasing the population of the Canadian prairies. For political reasons Canada needed a railroad linking the east and the west, and such a railroad required a settled prairie region in order to function economically. Eastern manufacturers looked for an expansion of their markets, speculators looked for large profits in prairie land; nobody asked whether the farming enterprises that were being established rested on a sound economic basis. The large land owners who provided the land made no attempt to conduct soil surveys or to direct settlement into areas where natural conditions might be conducive to successful agriculture. Government land policies were unsuited to prairie conditions, settling the pioneer on a tract of land too small to support him even under the best of circumstances. The demand for agricultural products increased during the First World War, prices soared, and more and more land was put under cultivation. Above-average rainfall and favorable economic conditions expanded the artificial land boom. Between 1911 and 1936 there was an 81% increase in the population of the prairies, and a 96.2% increase in occupied land.[2] Most of the settlers were unacquainted with prairie conditions, and many knew nothing of farming. They came singly, or in groups, for economic, religious or ethnic reasons. They came from the well-watered eastern sections of the continent, or from Europe, and any agricultural experience they may have had hardly prepared them for the type of dry land farming the prairies demanded. Inexperienced farmers were provided with sub-marginal or marginal land unsuited to cultivation, in areas where the average rainfall was barely sufficient to raise a crop, and moisture conditions during the below-average half of the cycle therefore totally inadequate.

But in the immediate post-war period, economic and natural conditions combined to confirm western settlement in its errors. The new farmers prospered. Their standard of living rose. Farm help was expensive, and with the adaptation of farm machinery to western conditions, mechanization moved rapidly into prairie agriculture. Tractors replaced horses for farm power; combines replaced threshing machines; plows, discs and harrows were hooked in series behind larger and larger power units; land holdings increased in size. It was a period of easy credit, and the farmer readily found money for the new machinery, and for expansion of his land holdings when the use of machinery made the larger unit more economical.

In 1920 and 1921 westerners were given a preview of the total disaster that awaited them in the thirties. Agricultural prices collapsed, and the whole agriculturally based western economy staggered. Many a farmer, deeply in debt, found himself demoted from owner of his land to tenant. Some of the poorer land was abandoned during this period. Conditions improved somewhat during the period from 1925 to 1928, but farm debt remained heavy.

The economic collapse of 1929 cut sharply into a booming economy in other parts of the country; it caught prairie agriculture in an already unstable condition.

Productivity in Saskatchewan, in terms of the estimated value of agricultural products actually sold off farms, had already dropped from a high of $333,894,000 in 1925, to less than $180,000,000 in 1929.[3] Much sub-marginal land was still being farmed; inexperienced farmers were cultivating good land ineffectively; even the good farmers were using methods unsuited in the long run to prairie conditions, and most were working the land with machinery which they had mortgaged their farms to buy. Large areas, particularly in Saskatchewan, were overly dependent on a single crop -- wheat. An economic depression could hardly have found the farmers of the prairie provinces in a more vulnerable economic position, and nature, embarking on a prolonged period of drought, joined the forces against them.

CHAPTER I

THE DEPRESSION -- 1929 - 1939

The great depression of the 1930's broke on an unsuspecting world with the dramatic collapse of the stock market on October 24, 1929 -- Black Thursday. Delayed only temporarily by the frantic efforts of bankers and other financial experts, market prices spiralled steadily downward for three and a half years. Optimistic assurances from business tycoons and political authorities failed to prevent the general economy from sinking into a matching decline; investment dwindled off, unemployment grew, wages shrank, credit froze and savings disappeared.

The resulting economic insecurity curtailed individual spending. Lowered demand resulted in lower production, less employment, lower wages, further financial insecurity, and so the vicious circle continued. In the cities many families found their incomes reduced or cut off altogether. Once their savings were exhausted they joined the destitute who stood in line waiting for relief, seeking cheaper accommodation, hoping for work.[1]

As we have seen, the depression caught the western prairies in a singularly vulnerable condition, with the drought, which was to last through the depression, already under way. But even under the best of circumstances, if crop conditions had remained favorable, the western prairies would probably have suffered from the depression even more seriously than the rest of the nation. Prices for farm products followed the general price levels through the slump of the post-war period, and the depths of the depression of the thirties.[2] Unfortunately for the farmer, the prices of the commodities he had to buy did not fall proportionately.[3] The high tariff policy pursued by the Bennett government, as a means of alleviating the distress of eastern industry, added to the burdens of the western farmer by maintaining the prices of farm machinery and other manufactured goods which he required, frequently raising them as much as 35% above the natural level. Freight rates were discriminatory, and as prices for farm goods continued to fall the farmer frequently found that shipping charges on his cattle or hogs exceeded their selling price, and he was left at the end of the transaction owing money rather than receiving it.[4]

Restricted credit conditions which accompanied the depression made the situation even more difficult. The farmer was forced to sacrifice seed grain and breeding stock, to neglect necessary repairs to buildings and equipment, to borrow on life insurance, to allow his taxes to fall into arrears and eventually to apply for government aid.[5]

Credit and debt have always been an essential part of the prairie farm economy. The pioneer depended upon the business men of his community to supply him with essentials -- food, clothing, implements, repairs -- on credit until proceeds from the year's crop were available in the fall. Bank loans were a source of ready cash, and were normally paid off when the crop was harvested. As the country became more settled and mechanization of the farm industry demanded more substantial investments in farm equipment, larger loans were secured by mortgages. The occasional crop failure was taken in stride, the payments being deferred until the following fall when the farmer would normally make up the deficiency in interest and principal.

This system, workable enough under average conditions, led rapidly to disaster when the farmer was unable to meet his loan payments year after year. Loan agreements were inflexible; there was no provision for adjustment of payments in accordance with the level of farm income, and as arrears of interest piled up, and interest on arrears was added to interest on principal, the agricultural economy of the prairies was faced with bankruptcy. Increasing agricultural debt had been characteristic of prairie development from the first, but this was a new situation. Whereas increasing debt during the boom period had resulted from increased investment in assets, the increasing debt of the depression was associated, instead, with deterioration in farm buildings and machinery and reduction of reserves of feed and fuel. The burden of debt was swelled by relief indebtedness, as farmers were forced to seek government aid in obtaining feed, seed and fuel for farm operations, as well as food and clothing for their families.[6]

The responsibility for relief fell heavily, first upon municipal governments and then on the provinces, since the Dominion government until 1937 contributed little. Unemployment grew in the west as in the east.[7] Wages, for those fortunate enough to have a job, diminished almost to the disappearing point -- in fact disappeared entirely if the employer's financial situation made it impossible for him to pay. Farm workers were offered $5 a month plus whatever food and accommodation the farmer could provide. Teachers' salaries were $500, $400, $300 a year on paper, and most of this amount -- if it was paid, and frequently the school board could not meet even this obligation -- went for room and board. Many teachers found that free board and lodging, of whatever type was available, made up their total pay for a year's work, and occasionally not even this was forthcoming.[8]

In many areas food was plentiful, though lacking in variety. Farmers, finding that their produce was unsaleable except at a price which scarcely covered the cost of marketing, used it as food for their families, bartered what they could in exchange for other necessities, or gave it to others in need. For those who were permanently established on farms or in their own homes, other necessities such as shelter and fuel were usually to be found. Fuel, food for basic livestock, and a certain amount of relief to assist in providing other necessities, were available through government relief. Ingenuity often supplied what the shortage of cash made it impossible to buy.

Urban renters did not fare as well, for they were frequently forced into poorer and poorer accommodation, at the mercy of landlords who, like themselves, were struggling for survival. Even for those who were permanently established, the relief system did not always work well. It was administered by local authorities, many of whom had little or no experience in administration, and there were many instances of discrimination, or of ignorance, dishonesty or stupidity in the distribution of relief. Because of residence requirements many found themselves outside the relief provisions, and suffered accordingly. This was especially true of those disoriented families and individuals who, seeking work, had left the localities where they had established residence and later found themselves unable to qualify for relief in any area.

Most individuals treated the transient with sympathy and did what they could to help by supplying a meal or a day's work or shelter for the night. Authorities tended to treat him as a criminal. Alone or in temporary company, the unemployed man travelled here and there in search of work, walking or more often "riding the rods" -- secreting himself beneath the cars of freight trains -- or hiding inside empty freight cars. If the train crew proved sympathetic, the "bums" rode openly in good weather, sitting in twos or threes or tens and twenties on flat cars, or standing in the open doors of empty box cars. Often they were hunted by railroad police, and thrown from the moving train or held for jail at the next town if caught. Police regarded them as a menace, hounded them from one town to the next, warned the public against offering them food or lodging and jailed them for vagrancy when they caught them.[9] Men who were willing and able to work, and accustomed to a secure position in respectable society, found themselves despised and cast out, forced to barter their pride and self-respect in exchange for the bare necessities of life.

Conditions in the government camps established to care for the single unemployed were far from ideal. The army, which had been given responsibility for the administration of the camps, imposed an almost military discipline, and treated the inmates with little respect. The ten to twenty cents a day which they were given for incidental expenses was viewed as pay for a day's work and resented, as inadequate to the point of insult. Discontent, encouraged by the left-wing underground, led to mass desertions of the camps. In the spring of 1935 nearly a thousand unemployed from British Columbia camps congregated in Vancouver where they staged a sit-down strike in the Post Office, nuisance parades which disrupted business in local department stores, and a May Day protest parade through the streets. In late June they headed east by freight, to carry to Ottawa their demands that the army be taken out of their camps and the residents paid fifty cents an hour. By the time they reached Calgary their number had swollen to 1300. In

Regina on July 1, police acting on orders from Ottawa attempted to arrest the leaders at a mass meeting which had been organized in Market Square. In the resulting riot one policeman was killed and many policemen and strikers were injured. The leaders of the trek were jailed, the men dispersed back to the freight yards and hobo jungles, and the work camps eventually disintegrated. Bennett was severely criticized on both the political and the humane level for his handling of the affair. It was widely recognized that, while the organizers of the trek were Communist, the men themselves were attempting to deliver a legitimate protest to the government, and their treatment at the hands of that government was, at best, ill-advised.[10]

It was not only the single unemployed who were migrants. During the decade from 1931 to 1941 a quarter of a million people migrated from the prairies,[11] but they found conditions little better in other parts of Canada. World markets, especially for primary products, were weak, and Canada's export trade was almost nonexistent. British Columbia, Newfoundland and the Maritimes, depending on exports of fruit, fish, lumber and minerals, were seriously affected by the loss of export trade. Ontario and Quebec were least affected, for the high tariff policy maintained by the Bennett government offered their industries a protected market, and their agriculture was mainly mixed farming which was better able to remain self-supporting in the face of depression conditions. Eastern farmers saw their income shrink because of depressed prices, but their productivity, unaffected by the drought, remained normal.

In all areas of the country, however, depressed market conditions resulted in unemployment and low incomes, and it was to the industrial areas of the east and to the west coast that the unemployed gravitated in search of work, and of escape from the harsh prairie winters. These disoriented elements bore the brunt of the depression suffering, and it may therefore be said that the industrial east, less drastically devastated by the depression than was the rest of the country, still saw the greatest suffering, though the individuals who suffered, forming the bread lines and filling the soup kitchens, were likely to be migrants from other areas.

The discontent and suffering occasioned by depression conditions resulted, inevitably, in political unrest. Communists and their sympathizers took full advantage of the situation, not only in the west but in all parts of the country. When the party was outlawed and the leaders jailed in 1931 the movement went underground, creating a martyr image for Tim Buck and working on the sympathies of those disenchanted with the old-line parties.

In the west, the disenchantment resulted in the formation of two new political parties. The party which rose to present the challenge in Saskatchewan had its beginnings with a Methodist minister, J. S. Woodsworth, who had led a small labour group in the House of Commons since 1921. With the assistance of the League for Social Reconstruction, an organization formed in 1932 by "a group of university professors, and people from the professions, business and higher technical positions who were concerned with social injustice but were not qualified to ally themselves with the politically active farmer-labour groups,"[12] a party called the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (C.C.F.) was formed in Calgary in August, 1932. The Western Labour Conference gave it support. The party platform was outlined in the "Regina Manifesto," adopted at the first party convention in Regina in 1933. In 1934 the new party won a quarter of the votes in the Saskatchewan election, and became the official opposition. In the following year it won seven seats federally.

Woodsworth made no attempt to use his religious affiliations politically. The second new party to appear in the west, Social Credit, was born out of a fundamentalist revival movement and never lost its religious orientation. Its leader, William Aberhart, had at the beginning no political ambitions. He was, like most other Albertans, profoundly disturbed by the economic situation on the prairies, and resentful of what the west considered to be the preferential treatment of eastern business interests over prairie agriculture by the federal government. Aberhart encountered the economic ideas of Major Douglas, a Scots engineer, adapted them to suit his own ideas and prairie conditions, and expounded them with feeling over the radio on his weekly revival hour program. He was a forceful and moving speaker, and through his influence the Social Credit party was created, sweeping into power in Alberta in 1935 with Aberhart more or less drafted as leader, and winning seventeen seats in the federal election the same year.

The international politics of the thirties, which played such a major part in the lives of British and American intellectuals, scarcely touched Canada's agricultural west. Farm laborers drifting across the prairies occasionally proclaimed themselves members of the I.W.W. (variously interpreted as "Industrial Workers of the World" or "I Won't Work," depending upon whether the interpretation came from laborer or employer). These were Communists or Communist sympathizers, and they succeeded in disrupting to some extent the industry of the prairies. Strikes and labor disputes were not really characteristic of the area, however, agriculture as the main industry hardly lending itself to such activities. One notable exception occurred in the fall of 1935 when workers in the coal mines at Estevan, Saskatchewan, struck in support of better working conditions and higher wages, and became involved in a riot when their protest march into the town, infiltrated by Communist agitators, was opposed by police. The war in Spain, which drew so many volunteers from other areas, played no significant part in prairie life. By the time war broke out in 1939, most of those who were mobile had left Saskatchewan for areas where they hoped to find greater opportunities, and those who remained were too involved in their own grim battle for survival to be attracted to foreign wars. Recruits for the fight against Fascism came mainly from the urban populations of the east.

While the old-line parties were jockeying for position in Ottawa and meeting the challenge of the new western political forces, another arm of government was working in the essentially non-political area of scientific agriculture. Agriculturists in the various experimental stations of the west were working with farmers in an attempt to adapt agricultural routines, land use and grain varieties so as to overcome the problems of drought, soil erosion and grasshoppers which threatened the existence of prairie agriculture. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (P.F.R.A.) was formed in 1935. It was funded by the federal government to provide large-scale erosion control demonstrations and water storage facilities, but with the invasion of grasshoppers and other insect pests its activities were broadened. Its projects included the creation of community pasture in south-western Saskatchewan, in the Cypress Hills area, returning to grass a large area of sub-marginal land which was unsuited for cultivation. The families on this land were relocated and aided financially in establishing themselves on land more suitable for farming. Many were transferred to irrigated land in southeastern Alberta, establishing the community of Rolling Hills.[13] Other activities included the encouragement of the use of trash cover to protect farm land from blowing, and experimental work with resistant grain varieties and poison bait to protect the crops from disease and insect damage. Just as the political war in Europe eventually eased the economic ills of the western world, so the scientific war waged by scientists and farmers in collaboration, eventually rescued the west from its agricultural problems -- but only after the return of normal moisture conditions had signalled that nature, too, was now willing to cooperate.

The political and agricultural activities of the period can be documented. They have been recorded by historians, and are filed in government records. Equally important but largely unrecorded are the social activities of westerners during the depression. These come to light in the reports of journalists currently investigating the depression years, in autobiographies and in the reminiscenses of men and women recalling their experiences during the thirties. The depression, it appears, fostered a return to the social attitudes of pioneer times, marked by neighborliness, a sharing of labour, a concern for others and the enjoyment of good fellowship.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Although the British Isles and Western Europe suffered from the same economic problems in the thirties as North America, the boundaries of the period, political, economic, social, are less clearly defined. The whole period tends to blend into the history of political and social movements, and to become a part of the long progression of European history. Nevertheless the experience of the depression was similar in many ways, throughout the western world. It should be useful, therefore, to glance briefly at the depression literature of the British Isles, of the United States, and of Eastern Canada and British Columbia, as background for the study of depression literature about the prairies. No attempt has been made to examine the literature exhaustively. The purpose has been only to establish basic themes, with special emphasis being placed on the literature dealing with the depression problems of the plains area of the United States, where conditions were most similar to those of the Canadian prairies.

The depression brought few problems to the British that had not been met before. Throughout the long history of the country the laboring classes had suffered privation and had fought against political and economic oppression.

The problems of the thirties were the old recurring ones, difficult, but familiar. Poverty was nothing new for the working classes; it was a part of their heritage. Labor unrest was nothing new for the ruling classes; it was written into their history.

There was therefore little novelty in the situation to attract the British novelist. Two novels, however, Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole and Nicholas Monsarratt's This Is the Schoolroom, deal with poverty in England during the depression. The setting of Greenwood's book is poverty even before the depression strikes. In its atmosphere the book is comparable to Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath or Gabrielle Roy's The Tin Flute or the western Canadian film The Drylanders -- the essence of depression literature in the new world. But it is even more closely related to European literature written long before the depression; to Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles or Zola's Germinal or Gogol's "Overcoat". It concerns itself with the problems of the depression, but they are the same old problems of the worker in the mines or the turnip fields or in any comparable occupation: the struggle against poverty, against the oppression of the owners, against stultifying labor and lack of opportunity, against the ever-encroaching tyranny of the machine.

Monsarratt's book deals with a problem characteristic of the depression in America: the experience of a man who finds himself suddenly plunged into unaccustomed poverty. Marcus Hendrycks, living a life of affluence and ease at Oxford, discovers himself without money upon the death of his father in 1935. Philosophically he faces the necessity of earning his own living. He leaves Oxford, and learns through experience what life is like outside the sheltered circle which money had created for him. Rejecting the financial aid proffered by his friends, he plunges into the unfamiliar world of the working man, loses his upper-class illusions one by one, becomes a Communist sympathizer, lives as a destitute transient, and eventually is drawn away to the country home of a friend to recover from the effects of malnutrition. But with his newly found insight into human values, he cannot relax and enjoy luxury. He is already beginning to feel unrest when the Spanish Civil War begins. He fights in Spain, is wounded, and returns to England disillusioned once more, not with the cause for which he fought, but with the fighting itself. He explains his confusion to a friend:

> "It didn't seem possible that with so much death and treachery and hatred we could be doing right. Socialists shouldn't hold life cheaply like that — it's a negation of the whole creed . . . . I'm in the hell of a muddle at the moment. Half of me knows that we ought to take a crack at Fascism whenever the opportunity occurs, and the other half has learnt, in Spain, that to join in that sort of struggle simply extends the chaos by one more man, and puts a just settlement so much further away. And that must be true of any war, international as well as civil. . . . Does Christianity cover it? We've been hanging priests where I've come from . . . . But real Christianity — the man's teaching, without the officialdom and the myths and the conjuring tricks — that might be the answer."[1]

So the story leads naturally from the economic side of the depression -- the poverty, the dirt, the hunger, the bugs -- through the political arguments to a final consideration of the philosophical aspects, not of the depression, but of life.

The novel sums up, in fictional form, the preoccupations of British thought during the thirties. Not only does it cover the basic depression themes -- poverty, unemployment, transience, with the political and philosophical considerations which arose from them -- but its point of view, that of the educated leisure class individual, is typical of British writing. The sense of class distinction may be the element which separates the British depression literature from that of the United States and Canada, and dictates its approach. Repeatedly, in the British writing, we find indications of an inbred separation between the worker and the intellectual, which made identification with the working classes difficult for the writers. The idealized working class aroused the sympathy and the concern of the intellectual; the individual working man (or woman), viewed at close range, was less appealing. Monsarratt's Marcus, for instance, in the midst of his Communist activities, meets with relief a girl from his own social class and mentally contrasts her with the "earnest Party members" with whom he has been associating, "The sort of women . . . who were such a poor advertisement for free love that it was an embarrassment to hear them professing it."[2] Louis MacNeice, in his "Autumn Journal III," admits the justice of the accusation, "What you want is not a world of the free in function/ But a niche at the top, the skimmings of the cream," with the almost apologetic comment,

> It is so hard to imagine
> A world where the many would have their
> chance without
> A fall in the standard of intellectual living
> And nothing left that the highbrow cared about.[3]

In "A Communist to Others" Auden looks at the gap from the opposite side, the Communist addressing the "splendid person" on the upper class level:

> You're thinking us a nasty sight;
> Yes, we are poisoned, you are right,
> Not even clean;
> We do not know how to behave
> We are not beautiful or brave
> You would not pick our sort to save
> Your first fifteen.[4]

The hero of Edward Upward's In the Thirties encounters the barrier when he struggles to forget his "petit-bourgeois" upbringing and ally himself, through marriage as well as political affiliation, with the working class. Although he tells himself that his reaction is despicable, he continues to be repelled by the lower-class image the girl projects. His instinctive reaction can only be controlled by an effort of will.

> There must be no sign on his face, when she met him, at the terminus, of the disloyal feelings towards her that he had had in the train. He must not visibly wince if she appeared beyond the ticket barrier wearing

> the cheap and cheaply decorative wavy-brimmed white linen hat which she had worn when she had come to visit his parents at the beginning of the holidays. He must not wince inwardly either; he must allow no recrudescence of that disgraceful revulsion, painfully disgraceful to him as he remembered it, which he had had when seeing her off at the station after her visit.[5]

The problem forms the theme of this novel.

Birth and breeding, rather than economic circumstances, determined the social status for the British writer. As an intellectual he saw the depression as a situation to be dealt with intellectually. He viewed it objectively, whatever his personal circumstances; a plunge into poverty altered his way of life, but not his point of view. Orwell, in Down and Out in Paris and London and The Road to Wigan Pier, examines the circumstances of poverty in detail, but, as Gollanz suggests,[6] he moves in the midst of poverty but always aloof from it, seeing his own impoverished situation objectively and seeking the political remedy.

This is not to say that the British writer was insensible to the suffering of the poor; a more personal concern is expressed occasionally in the poetry, as for instance in C. Day Lewis's "Carol":

> Oh hush thee, my baby,
> Thy cradle's in pawn
> No blankets to cover thee
> Cold and forlorn.
> The stars in the bright sky
> Look down and are dumb
> At the heir of the ages
> Asleep in a slum.

The hooters are blowing,
No heed let him take;
When baby is hungry
'Tis best not to wake.
Thy mother is crying,
Thy Dad's on the dole:
Two shillings a week is
The price of a soul. [7]

The poetic approach, predictably, is less intellectual, more emotional, than that of the prose. The poetry of the period, too, is more revealing of the minds and personalities of the writers than is the prose, possibly because the prose was written for the public, while the poetry, as Julian Symons suggests, seems addressed to a select group; an in-crowd who can be spoken to freely without fear of misunderstanding, and without the necessity of explanation.[8] But political issues dominate the poetry as well as the prose, and Lewis sounds the more characteristic note when he prophesies the end of tyranny, the rise of the worker:

You above all who have come to the far end, victims
Of a run-down machine, who can bear it no longer;
Whether in easy chairs chafing at impotence
Or against hunger, bullies and spies preserving
The nerve for action, the spark of indignation --
Need fight in the dark no more, you know your enemies.
You shall be leaders when zero hour is signalled;[9]
Wielders of power and welders of a new world.

And again:

It is now or never, the hour of the knife,
The break with the past, the major operation.[10]

The political emphasis in the literature of the period indicates no lack of concern on the part of the writers for the suffering of the working classes. Although the literature does not dwell upon the plight of the worker, it deals with his problems directly, but on a different level. The problem of the unemployed worker standing in line for the dole or carrying a symbolic coffin through the streets of London or chaining himself to an iron railing in protest against his lot was ultimately a political one, and the political struggle of the period, especially in Europe, was between Fascism and Communism. In Britain as in the United States most of the sympathy was for the Communist -- the common man rising against oppression and injustice and proclaiming his right to a share in the material goods he creates, fighting for his right to freedom in Spain. Perhaps the most interesting literary phenomenon of the time was the Left Book Club, formed to provide an outlet for the left-wing political writers of the time. Their concern was humanitarian, and their goal was the release of the worker from the intolerable economic and social situation in which he found himself. Aldous Huxley, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNeice, George Orwell, Cecil Day Lewis and John Cornford, politically oriented and basically concerned with the humanitarian issues of the period, discussed these political and humanitarian issues in non-fiction, in fiction and in poetry. The struggle between Communism and Fascism was carried on with as much vigor and heat in the literature of the period as on the battlefields of Spain -- and by many of the same people.

In the British literature of the period, then, poverty, unemployment, transience are subjects for discussion, but they are treated as incidental to the political aspects of the period, which form the main theme.

American literature of the depression shows the same sympathy with the Communist philosophy, and with the plight of the working man, as the British. Many American writers joined the Communist Party; some took an active as well as a literary part in the struggle in Spain. Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls arose from his experiences in Spain as a war correspondent, as did some of his other writing. There was no Left Book Club in the United States; there was instead the League of American Writers, dominated by Communist doctrine and including in its membership such literary figures as Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Erskine Caldwell, Marc Connelly, Clifford Odets, James Farrell, Upton Sinclair, Carl Van Doren, Lewis Mumford, John Steinbeck and Langston Hughes. These and many more supported the Communist Party actively, and the writing fraternity as a whole scorned those of their number, such as Scott Fitzgerald, Thornton Wilder, Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, who held to more conservative political beliefs.

Also political in its overtones is the literature which deals with the trade union movement. Occasionally, as in The Land of Plenty, a novel by Robert Cantwell, and The Cradle Will Rock, a play by Marc Blitzstein, and in

Steinbeck's In Dubious Battle, the trade union movement and its struggle for organization and power were themselves the subject of the literature. The leaders, the organizers, the men struggling to convince the worker that his only hope of fair wages and decent working standards lies in the formation of an organization which can present a united front to management -- these are individuals whose characters and concerns and activities offer a wealth of material for action and drama. At a time when the general public was experiencing the results of the breakdown of the capitalistic system, literature which glorified the worker, championed his cause and demanded economic reorganization and a redistribution of wealth found ready acceptance by the public.

Closely related are the works which deal with the plight of the worker himself; the man who is caught between his dependence on the meagre wage management offers and his loyalty to his fellow workers who, through union organization, are attempting to force management to offer better pay and decent working conditions. Management itself is sometimes the villain, sometimes the helpless victim caught in the economic machinery which, out of control, threatens destruction for both labour and management. Steinbeck's two books In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath are closely related in subject, but differ in emphasis. The former is the story of the organizer; the worker is sympathetically treated, the plight of the small landowner viewed with some understanding, and the large landowner depicted as the ruthless unprincipled entrepreneur, intent upon retaining his privileged position in society regardless of the cost in human suffering, and by any means, legal or illegal, in his power. The union organizer is a Christ figure, working tirelessly, suffering greatly and sacrificing himself entirely for the cause of humanity.

He appears again, emphasis slightly altered, as Casy in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Here he is more human, less sure of his philosophy, more philosophical and less political in his thinking. But once again he is the crusader, sacrificing himself for humanity, dying for a cause. Similarly selfless, though his concern is for one man rather than for humanity in general, is George Milton in *Of Mice and Men*. The deification of the individual seems to be characteristic of Steinbeck, as is his strong faith in the strength and value of the human character. *In Dubious Battle* tells the story of the struggle to organize the workers. *The Grapes of Wrath* deals with the same struggle, but here the political aspects are subordinate to the philosophical. *Of Mice and Men* suggests the possibility that social laws defensible in themselves may result in cruelty and injustice to the individual. Equally or perhaps more important in *Of Mice and Men*, and appearing in most of Steinbeck's work, is the responsibility theme: the necessity for the strong, the gifted, the fortunate, to accept responsibility for offering help to those in less fortunate circumstances. Steinbeck's recurring theme is essentially the Christian doctrine of the divinity and the brotherhood of men.

In *In Dubious Battle* this basic theme is secondary to the political overtones of the story. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, by far the most complex of the three books under discussion, Steinbeck includes the economic problems of the Oklahoma sharecroppers, of the migrant workers, of the bankers, and the fruit growers; he philosophizes about the meaning of life; he demonstrates the dehumanizing effects of fear and the humanizing effects of suffering. Superficially the economic and political and social aspects of the book demand immediate action to relieve an intolerable social situation. If this were all, the book would have died with the depression. On a broader level the book is a testament of faith in humanity, and whether it is viable philosophy or sentimental romance depends upon the extent to which the reader accepts Steinbeck's assertion that man, deprived of all else, retains his basic human dignity; that there will always be a disciple to carry on the religious creed of the martyr; that suffering and privation cannot dry up the milk of human kindness and human concern.

Steinbeck's workers and organizers differ from those of Cantwell and Blitzstein in that they are agricultural; they are engaged in farm work, and some have been driven from their farms by depression and drought. Josephine Herbst deals also with the agricultural scene -- with the plight of the farmer, with organization for strike action in an agricultural area -- the farm strike in Iowa in 1932. Her trilogy, Pity is Not Enough, The Executioner Waits and Rope of Gold, looks at the situation through the eyes of an assortment of characters, illustrating the complexity of the problems and the difficulties which arise to make any attempt at solving them appear futile.

> The government expert was trying to explain. "Now you farmers are just nervous. There's no use in looking so far ahead. A step at a time. We're getting relief in here fast as we can."
>
> "You're not paying us relief," said a farmer. "You're paying the banks relief."
>
> "I don't understand you," said the expert, smiling nervously and looking at his assistant, a young man who was hoping to get through with these people so he could get on to see his girl. "You're getting two dollars for your sheep and goat skins."
>
> "I get you," said the farmer rising and presenting one of those bull necked fronts so antagonizing to a well-meaning expert. "The government pays us two dollars for a skin. We got to sell because the drought kills the sheep and goats. They got no feed. . . . Who gets the two dollars? Is it us that took care of the flocks? Right off the bat the banker gets a dollar that we never even see. Then on that other dollar, we don't get more than thirty cents because by the time we skin them and take them to a point of shipment it costs plenty. So when this feller Richberg tells how he puts two billion up for us farmers, he's talking through his hat. He's handing over one billion to his buddies, the bankers, first of all. Then we get about thirty cents, see."
>
> "Well, we can't go into that," said the expert uncomfortably, looking frantically for a friendly face. "But if you have any suggestions of any better plan, I'll be glad to hear them. . . ."
>
> When he was whirling off in his car to the next point, he continued to feel the cold arrows of that farmer's speech. He felt as if

> they were at his heels, with their cold determined eyes. The worst of it was, they were right.

But there is, in Josephine Herbst's characters, little unselfish concern for the plight of the sufferers. When it appears briefly, as it does in the preceding quotation, it quickly gives place to more selfish practical considerations.

> The farmers would refuse to starve, they would come in droves, they would pick the cans from the shelves, they would fill their old cars with flour and tins. They would be at each other's throats, the storekeeper and poor farmer and now another cog had been found to throw into the machinery, the poor farm hand, his threat to the farmer with his strikes won on big farms for higher wages. The trick to keep them apart; to keep them fighting, let dog eat dog.
>
> The poor fellow, still human, groaned but he could see an implication when it stuck out like a sign post. My God, if they ever realized they were in the same boat, if they ever quit tearing at each other's throats, if the little storekeeper ever got it into his head that his friend, his only friend was the poor farmer, not the rich banker, where in hell would his job be too? So let the feuds brew and the nightriders ride, let them go to it. 11

Thus, although the approach may be different, we are led in the Herbst books to the same conclusion Steinbeck reaches: fear is a dehumanizing emotion which leads the privileged toward a policy of "divide and conquer," and the only hope for the underprivileged lies in cooperation and mutual assistance.

Not all of the characters in the Herbst trilogy see the problems as clearly as do the government expert and the articulate farmer. Miss Peck, under siege in her office and awaiting rescue, has a viewpoint typical of the shallow, narrow-minded individual.

> "You'll have to get someone over here quick, Mr. Purdy," said old Miss Peck into the mouthpiece, her hands trembling so that her words came over the wire in gasps and splutters. "Hoodlums are at the very door. By the million." She listened to the strong male voice over the wire and dropped the receiver as a brick crashed through the window. Oh they would kill her. She'd die and never get a chance to scrub Papa's tombstone as she did every Decoration Day for years on end. Something was tied to the brick. She crawled from behind the filing cabinet and reached out a hand. Mercy, suppose she couldn't get away. Whatever would they do to her? Stories of Huns and barbarian hordes swept terrifyingly refreshingly through her parched mind.
>
> Lord help us, she prayed as she tried to read. The words shivered. Demand. They were demanding again. Always demanding. Never a pretty please. No manners. Demand. Demand. Poor people should take what they can get and be grateful. Why should they have cash? They no doubt spent it on drink. All poor people drank or wanted to. They guzzled it away. Well they could shout and howl all day if they wanted so long as that door at the foot of the stairs held. . . . What did they want for nothing. Don't tell her. She'd suffered. She'd walked the streets more than a year looking for work until she was in tatters. But she guessed she knew what side her bread was buttered on and had sense enough to be grateful when a job was made for her. 12

The viewpoint may differ with the individual character, but the reaction is the same. Under the stress of the times there is no room for generosity and unselfishness, except in the hearts and minds of those who have nothing left to lose.

But once there is nothing more to lose, human compassion reasserts itself, and is, perhaps, the basis of further human suffering for the farmer who sees his stock go hungry, and for his family:

> They had moved out to the back door, slowly inevitably as if pulled by magnets. The great copperish fields were pulling them, they were lying bald and angry with tufts of sour dust whirling in spikes of revengeful horns. A long painful moo, weak and blasted made an echo that sounded like a horn blown a long way off. The three listened to it, looking around a little wildly but there was nowhere they could go to escape that cry. The wind would carry it straight to them on any part of the farm. The wind was blowing off the fine top soil, it had blown away the seeds, blighted with wrath all the turnips and garden greens. When it got through with the soil, it would begin with them, and no one would prevent it. It was helping the powers that be. It was destroying crops, animals, life.

But it could not, apperently, destroy human faith, human courage:

> "Don't you worry," says the missus, "I'm going to make you a pie, I don't know out of what but out of something."
>
> "You're damned right I ain't worrying. This land will raise us a crop or we'll know the reason why. We ain't going to starve. I'll guarantee you that." 14

But little agricultural literature of the period discusses organized labor or political problems of any kind. Agriculture in the mid-west and the plains area was less concerned with economics than with the weather. The drought, entirely separate from the depression and complicating its effects in the plains area of Canada and the United States only by coincidence, becomes the major concern in the areas effected by it. Initially it was the drought, not the depression, which drove the Okies west to California. The American literature which deals with this area -- and it is a small body of literature -- suggests that the dust and drought were more disrupting emotionally than the economic problems of the plains farmer. The economy is man-made, and what man has made man can unmake, change, repair. The prairie farmer is traditionally at war with the government and its economic laws. He is accustomed, also, to a capricious nature which sometimes refuses to cooperate with him in his efforts at production. But faith in the land, and in his own ultimate ability to wrest a living from the soil is basic to the farmer. The prolonged drought, and the helpless inactivity in the face of failure which accompanied it, struck at the very roots of this faith, and deprived of it the farmer himself faces destruction. This is suggested symbolically by Steinbeck when Grandpa Joad cannot survive forcible separation from the land. Muley Graves perhaps senses it when he refuses to leave the land, and trusts his chances of survival to primitive nature rather than to civilization.

Many of the farmers refused to relinquish their faith in the land, in spite of all that man and nature combined could do to make their position intolerable. One of these is Pa Thor in Feike Feikema's The Golden Bowl. The scene of this book is the western part of South Dakota, in the early thirties when the wind erosion problem was at its height. The protagonist, Maury, has come from

Oklahoma, from a farm which has been completely "dusted out," and he finds the situation in South Dakota depressingly similar to the one he has left.

More or less by accident he finds himself involved in the fortunes of the Thors -- mother and father and daughter -- who are living in extreme poverty in the dust bowl, convinced that rain must come before long, and restore to the countryside the life and greenery that had been natural to it before the dust arose. The father, particularly, is stubbornly optimistic, in spite of the obvious hopelessness of his situation. To Maury, fresh from his experience in Oklahoma, it is apparent that the Thors have no alternative but to admit the failure of their farming venture. Their neighbours have already left, their stock is on the verge of starvation, even the garden will not grow. Yet they stubbornly refuse to give up, and their attitude explains the perseverance of the many plains farmers who weathered the dust and the depression, refusing to admit defeat.

> "You know, Pa, what I can't figure out is how you can live in all this emptiness without goin' nuts."
>
> Mildly startled, Pa Thor took his pipe from his mouth and looked at Maury, shaking his head. "I dunno . . . I never thought much about it. This is the only place I've ever lived. It's all I know."
>
> Maury nodded. He paced. "Sure, sure. I know that. But by God, I know that I personally, can't live here. I can't live where it's empty. I need growths. I need corn an' grain an' animals an' people around me. I think there must be something wrong with people that kin live in the Dust Bowl without goin' nuts. . . ."

> Pa Thor took a step toward the back room and then, turning, asked, "Son, down there in Oklahoma, there where you lived, it wasn't always empty was it?"
>
> "No. No, it wasn't." Maury drew furiously on his shortening cigarette.
>
> "Well, it wasn't always empty here, either."
>
> Maury sobering, thought a moment. He took another puff, and then tossed his cigarette into the stove.
>
> Pa Thor pointed to the window, pointed to something far away. "Son, if you was to go back to Oklahoma now, couldn't you see, if you was to close your eyes, the land full of milk an' honey again, like the Bible says?"
>
> "Sure, but such dreamin' is fool's gold."
>
> Pa Thor shook his head, still pointing. "Son, when I look out a that winder there, I kin still see this land as it's been. They say it's a dust bowl now, an' maybe it is. But I can close my eyes and see the golden bowl it's been. There's been gold corn an' wheat an' hay an' buffalo grass in the fall, an' gold pheasants an' cows an' women, all gold. It's been full a gold. I can see all that. This land ain't empty for me. It's the only land I know. It's been full a gold an' it'll be full a gold again. I know." 15

The book also provides one of the best literary pictures of a dust storm, and in doing so perhaps illustrates another reaction to the drought. Dry land farming is a challenge in itself, and attracts the man with determination. It is not surprising, then, if the additional challenge of the drought, and especially the violence of the dust storm, should arouse him to greater determination and a stubborn refusal to accept defeat. Taking refuge from the storm in the farm shack with the Thor family, Maury listens to the wind.

> The windows rang.
>
> He had the distinct feeling that it wasn't a wind they were wrestling with, but a malevolent being, and one of such unmatch-

able size that, if it wanted to, it could kill them all.

Just the same, Maury thought grimly, the Big Fellow would know he'd been in a fight before he got through with the Thors.

The small shack rocked.

The Big Wind came on, tearing, roaring, shouting.

Maury sat waiting.

The earth thundered about them. He had a feeling that Judgement Day was at hand.

Maury quaked a little.

Then, with the sound of a flashing shotgun, a pane in the window over his cot popped out and the glass splintered through the shack. Pieces of it hit his face.

He jumped up, thoroughly frightened. He quaked. The others stiffened in their chairs. Just before the lamp went out, he saw thick veils of dust driving into the house.

He saw, too, just before the flame vanished, the small square breadboard lying on the table where Ma Thor had placed it to cut the hardened bread. He guessed it might cover the opening in the window. He leaped to the stove. Behind it were a pail of nails and a hammer. He grabbed them up and, crawling in the dark, found the breadboard. Vaguely, he was aware that the others were also stirring around in the room.

Now, he thought, now! Let the Big Fellow try again. 16

Perhaps it was the very violence of this storm that stirred the spirit. More often the dust became a dull grey monotony that drained the courage and sapped the spirit rather than aroused it, and presented a series of small practical problems to be solved rather than a mighty challenge. The following are selections from Caroline A. Henderson's "Letters from the Dust Bowl."

Eva, Oklahoma,
March 8, 1936.

Dear Evelyn:

Since I wrote to you, we have had several bad days of wind and dust. On the worst one recently, old sheets stretched over door and window openings, and sprayed with kerosene,

> quickly became black and helped a little to keep down the irritating dust in our living rooms. Nothing that you see or read will be likely to exaggerate the physical discomfort or material losses due to these storms. Less emphasis is usually given to the mental effect, the confusion of mind resulting from the overthrow of all plans for improvement or normal farm work, and the difficulty of making other plans, even in a tentative way. To give just one specific example: the paint has been literally scoured from our buildings by the storms of this and previous years; we should by all means try to 'save the surface;' but who knows when we might safely undertake such a project? The pleasantest morning may be a prelude to an afternoon when the 'dustdevils' all unite in one hideous onslaught. The combination of fresh paint with a real dust storm is not pleasant to contemplate.

After discussing the emotional ties which bind the farmer to his land, she adds:

> There are also practical considerations that serve to hold us here, for the present. Our soil is excellent. We need only a little rain -- less than in most places -- to make it productive. No one who remembers the wheat crops of 1926, 1929, 1931, can possibly regard this as permanently submarginal land. The newer methods of farming suggest possibilities of better control of moisture in the future. Our entire equipment is adapted to the type of farming suitable for this country and would have to be replaced at great expense with the tools needed in some other locality. We have spent so much in trying to keep our land from blowing away that it looks foolish to walk off and leave it, when somewhat more favorable conditions seem now to 'cast their shadows before.' I scarcely need to tell you that there is no use in thinking of either renting or selling farm property here at present. It is just a place to stand on -- if we can keep the taxes paid -- and work and hope for a better day. We could realize nothing whatever from all our years of struggle with which to make a fresh start. 17

In these letters, too, we find one of the few references to the work which was done to control the drifting, and minimize the damage caused by the wind. Mrs. Henderson speaks of the work of the soil conservation experts, and the political problems involved, and of the complications caused by the absentee ownership of large blocks of the land. But behind and within and around her letters is the theme which seems to be basic to much of the agricultural literature of the time: the farmer's emotional involvement with his home farm, and his reluctance to accept what it is as a permanent replacement for what it once was.[18]

Remaining on the land or leaving it was not always a matter of choice. Many families and more individuals were forced from the land by economic conditions. Sharecroppers and renters, like Steinbeck's Okies, were driven from their homes when their activities became uneconomic. Renters were evicted, mortgaged farms seized when mortgage payments could not be met. Many of the evicted farmers lost not only their means of livelihood, but the whole fabric of their lives. The contrast between the two warring elements -- the cold intellectual logic of the economic situation which tended to force the farmer from his land, and the emotional ties which bound him to it -- provide the opening theme for Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath.

> The owners of the land came onto the land,
> or more often a spokesman for the owners came.
> They came in closed cars, and they felt the

> dry earth with their fingers, and sometimes they drove big earth augers into the ground for soil tests. The tenants, from their sun-beaten dooryards, watched uneasily when the closed cars drove along the fields. And at last the owner men drove into the dooryards and sat in their cars to talk out of the windows. The tenant men stood beside the cars for a while, and then squatted on their hams and found sticks with which to mark the dust.

After a suitable interval of explanation, the owner men "came to the point."

> You'll have to get off the land. The plows'll go through the dooryard.
>
> And now the squatting men stood up angrily. Grampa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away. And Pa was born here, and he killed weeds and snakes. Then a bad year came and he had to borrow a little money. An' we was born here. There in the door -- our children born here. And Pa had to borrow money. The bank owned the land then, but we stayed and we got a little bit of what we raised . . . . It's our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours. That's what makes it ours -- being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it. 19

When the income from the family farm, sharply reduced by drought and poor market conditions, was no longer sufficient for the support of the family, the young people left in search of supplementary or alternate employment. Many of them, unable to find work, joined the vast numbers of unemployed from the towns and the cities, travelling restlessly across the country in the hopeless quest for jobs that did not exist. Destitute and without means of transportation they hitch-hiked, stole rides in empty box cars, walked the railroads and highways aimlessly, with no place to go and no place to stay. Their story, individually and collectively, reappears repeatedly in the literature of the depression.

One of the most realistic accounts of the life of the migrant is to be found in Nelson Algren's Somebody in Boots. In grim detail it relates the experiences of a nineteen-year-old Texas boy cast adrift during the thirties. Algren's migrant is an outcast, despised by society, persecuted by authority, suffering physically from hunger and exposure and mistreatment, and mentally from the filth and cruelty and ostracism from which he cannot escape. There is no relief from the psychological horror of Algren's account. His migrants cling to life, not because there is anything of value in their present, or any hope in the future, but simply because the instinct for self-preservation is a part of human nature. The most intolerable element in their lives is the ever-present canker of the injustice from which they cannot escape: the realization that their poverty results from economic conditions over which they have no control, and that the society which is responsible for their poverty now condemns and tortures them because they are destitute.[20] Algren's migrants see only the greed and corruption and sadism all around them; even the compassion which one unfortunate feels for his fellow sufferers is a hardly realized emotion, blunted, like his own despair and frustration by long acquaintance with suffering. There is none of Steinbeck's faith in human nature in Algren's book.

Much less depressing is Woody Guthrie's autobiography, Bound for Glory. The fact that it is autobiography rather than fiction may account for the difference in mood; misery experienced is often leavened with moments of lightness which are not apparent to the outside observer. The suffering and injustice, the physical pain and mental despair, are there in Bound for Glory, but whereas the life Algren describes can only be viewed with horror and disgust, Guthrie's experiences provide a balance of pleasure and pain which, viewed in retrospect, is bearable and even pleasant. Much of this is the result of Guthrie's unquenchable spirit which accepted the hardships but refused to be crushed by them. In part, too, it may be that in his music he had a means of entertaining himself and his companions, and even of providing a meagre income which did much to relieve physical discomfort. Whatever the reason -- whether the difference lies in the personal philosophy of the author, the particular experience which fell to his lot or a different emotional approach on the part of the individual migrant -- the view of human nature in Bound for Glory is affirmative where Algren's is negative.

The unemployed man -- both the migrant and the man who is forced by lack of work to live on the bounty of other more fortunate members of his family -- appears and reappears throughout the literature of the time. Thomas Wolfe, in You Can't Go Home Again, describes the homeless men who crowd into the public restrooms in New York City in search of shelter for the night. Farrell's Studs Lonigan feels the degradation and shame of the man who searches in vain for employment and is forced to the conclusion that no one wants or needs him, that there is no place for him in society. Sherwood Anderson's documentaries reveal elemental poverty and complete hopelessness and ignorance in backward agricultural communities.

With the advent of Roosevelt and the New Deal a more hopeful note creeps into the literature. The migrant now has a place to go, a job to do. Roads and reforestation plans reach the uneconomic agricultural areas, providing jobs and incomes and contact with the outside world. Relief programs, better organized, become more effective. The rains come again to the west, and then war is declared and there is once more a demand for produce, an incentive for industry, a need for soldiers and workers, and the depression is over. This phase appears less frequently in the literature. Sherwood Anderson, dealing with facts rather than drama in his Puzzled America, includes case histories of men at work under the New Deal, but creative literature has little to say about this aspect of the depression.

The improvements in economic conditions brought relief to the rich as well as the poor. The suffering of the fair-minded conscientious individual who remained in comfortable circumstances in the midst of almost universal suffering and despair is of a subtle kind, and is easily overlooked by the historian and the economist. The literary man, more sensitive to psychological and philosophical aspects of the social upheaval, draws attention to his plight on several occasions. Leonie, for instance, in S. N. Behrman's End of Summer, finds that those who need help refuse to allow her to ease her conscience by giving them gifts. The well-to-do elements in Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath are driven to harsh denial of the humanity of the suffering migrants, in order to justify their own comfort. The same crusading spirit which inspired Jane Addams in her charitable work, bringing down upon her the condemnation of her own social class, operated in many places during the depression, arousing the same resentment in the hearts of those comfortable elements of society who preferred to believe that the poor were responsible for their own suffering, and therefore needed no sympathy. Hull House, founded in an earlier time, worked to capacity during the thirties; Edmund Wilson writes of this in The American Earthquake.

The individuals on any level of society, however, react to a situation in accordance with their characters. Not all of the fortunate, whose jobs remained secure and whose lives remained comfortable, felt any responsibility toward those whose lives were shattered. Some, fearful of suffering the same fate, withdrew behind closed doors and within closed minds, not daring to examine the true situation, and admit that their preferred position was attributable as much to blind luck as to any virtue in themselves. Some, indifferent to considerations of human compassion and justice, saw only the opportunity to exploit the helpless. We find these people scattered throughout the literature, treated occasionally as individuals, but more often as a group: the landowners in In Dubious Battle, and The Grapes of Wrath; the police and railroad officials and the corrupt administrators behind the charitable organizations in Somebody in Boots; the proprietors of restaurants and wayside stands; the used car salesmen; the homemakers and employed individuals who fed and sheltered the hungry migrants. They emerge as individuals from the literature briefly, and then disappear into the crowd. The migrants, united in their misery, are predictable, but there is no way of foretelling the reaction of the comfortable individual when he is faced with the reality of the suffering around him. This uncertainty itself is an added element in the suffering of the destitute.

Repeatedly we find, in the literature, that it is the man who has little or nothing himself who is capable of the great sacrifice. The small landowners in Steinbeck's books are the ones who offer help to the migrant workers; Rosasharn feeds the helpless stranger with the milk from her breast, since it is all she has left to give; Jacob, in Odet's Awake and Sing "slips" from the roof to his death in the street below, trading his life for the cash he could not provide in any other way.

The reader who seeks to learn from American literature what it meant to live through the depression in the United States must content himself with the knowledge that there is no one answer. The experience of the depression differed with the situation and the individual. The whole of it is there in the literature. Interpretations can vary as much as the original experiences did, depending, again, upon the area that is examined and the eyes that look.

There are, however, clearly discernible themes, the same themes found in the British literature, but with a different emphasis. The emphasis in the political literature is on domestic rather than international problems; the labor movement, making its first appearance in America, is of major importance in industrial areas. The unemployed and the homeless migrant receive their share of attention. But sharing the spotlight with these themes, and even thrusting them aside in some parts of the country, is a new subject of major importance: the impact of the depression on the agricultural worker, in the east and mid-west where, like the industrial worker, he suffered from economic disaster; in California where hordes of migrants created social problems impossible of solution; on the western plains where drought and dust complicated a difficult situation further. It is in this area of rural life that American literature of the depression differs, thematically, from British.

Most closely related to the depression literature of the Canadian prairies is the literature which deals with the problems of agriculture in the American west; with the impact of economic collapse, dust and drought on the life of the prairie farmer.

The depression in the Canadian east had more in common with the depression experience of the industrial regions of the United States than with the prairie regions of either country. In the industrial areas of both, the predominating literary themes are related to unemployment and poverty and the resulting psychological and political problems. The transient theme is explored more seriously in American literature than in Canadian, however. In the novels of MacLennan and Gabrielle Roy the similarities with American studies of poverty such as Farrell's Studs Lonigan are evident, but there is no Canadian counterpart of Somebody in Boots or Bound for Glory. The theme of the transient is one which moves in the background of much of the Canadian literature of the non-prairie regions, without becoming dominant. In MacLennan's Two Solitudes Paul Tallard mentions work in the Saskatchewan harvest fields as one source of income for his schooling, and Azarius, in Gabrielle Roy's The Tin Flute, briefly contemplates taking to the road, as an escape from his domestic problems. One short story, "Riders," by Frederick Philip Grove, points up the lack of direction which governed the movements of the transients. The riders in Grove's story, like the transients in the British literature of Orwell and Monsarratt, travelled because circumstances made it necessary.

> "And where are you going now?"
> "To Woodrow. They are building a bridge there."
> "If that's what you are counting on, I can save you the trouble. They've got their own unemployed and refuse to give work to the transients."
> "I know," Gardiner replied. "Doesn't matter. I've got to get a roof over my head. I'll go anyway."
> "Are you sure of a roof at Woodrow?"
> "As sure as at any other town where I haven't been yet."
> "How do you mean?"
> "At the jail. They give you twenty-four hours; then you've got to move on."[21]

There are other fleeting references in the non-prairie literature, but where the transient's life is described in any detail, as it is in Garner's Cabbagetown and Irene Baird's Waste Heritage, the scene moves to the prairies.

The political unrest which pervaded the period, like the experiences of the transients, moves in the background of most of the literature, but it receives greater emphasis, emerging as a main theme in some books. It appears briefly in Callaghan's Such is My Beloved, in discussions between Father Dowling and his atheist friend, Charlie. Father Dowling is concerned about the moral aspects of the prostitution to which poverty has condemned Midge and Ronnie, but Charlie sees the problem differently.

> "If you don't mind me saying it, Father, I disagree with you to a certain extent about these girls," Charlie said. "In the perfectly organized state there would be no streetwalkers. If the state has proper control of the means of production and the means of livelihood, it's never necessary for a woman to go on the streets. No healthy woman of her own accord would ever do such work. It's too damned degrading. But if in the ideal state there were still women who were streetwalkers out of laziness or a refusal to work steadily then they would be kicked out or interned somewhere for laziness, or as non-producers. Then they'd have to work or starve. Your mistake is seeing this as a religious problem. It's really an economic problem." 22

Father Dowling has met Charlie, a young medical student, at a meeting of the League for Social Reconstruction, and the ideal state to which Charlie refers is the ideal put forward by the league which was the moving force behind the founding of the C.C.F. in Saskatchewan. To this extent the concerns of the book are political, but Callaghan makes no attempt to discuss the economic or political aspects of the period analytically. The depression itself is an element apart from the main theme; it ~~is~~ too intrinsic a part of the lives of Callaghan's characters to permit its isolation and examination. The characters do not talk about the depression; they react to it.

The emphasis is reversed in Claude Gregory's Forgotten Men. Gregory's purpose is to expound the political theme, and characters and events are subordinated. Christopher Worth, the son of a millionaire, stops for a moment to listen to a speaker in the park and is instantly drawn to the cause of the unemployed men who are protesting their situation. He goes home with the speaker and meets his wife, decides to move in with them as a boarder, is jilted by his fiancee and disowned by his father, all within the space of a few hours. We might admire him as a man of courage and decision, except that there seems to be a minimum of purpose behind his actions. "What good can you possibly do?" his father demands, on being told of the situation. "What good could he do? Christopher had not thought about that."[23] It seems a subject that he might have considered, before taking such a decisive step. The other characters in the book are no more believable.

Thematically, the book is intended as a scathing denunciation of an economic system which permits the strong to exploit the weak, and of the human elements which take advantage of the opportunity. It fails because its approach is superficial and overdramatic. The whole situation is hopeless romance. Christopher Worth becomes a Christ figure, preaching to the multitudes. Embarking on a course of action, on page 40, without any thought as to its purpose, he continues by vigorously expounding, on page 284, a remedy which he himself says "can never be, not so long as dishonest men live." He may not be a convincing figure, but at least he is consistent.

The chief value of the book lies in its very weakness. Its discussion of the economic problems which faced the "forgotten men" during the depression is in every way an oversimplification, but it is the very oversimplification which existed in the minds of ordinary men and women everywhere. How could there be poverty in the midst of plenty? How could there be unemployment when there was so much that needed doing? By what right did a few people lay claim to the wealth of the country? To destroy food when people were starving was, on the face of it, not only ridiculous but sinful, and the natural reaction was to condemn those in power who allowed it to happen; the "financial wizards" who "get to work with their fiendish cunning, for their own gains;" the governments which refuse to "protect us from the leech-like hands of men who exploit humanity."[24] In spite of its technical weaknesses, the novel gives us a clear picture of what was in the minds and hearts of the ordinary people of Canada, who had no means of knowing the difficulties involved in working out such "mechanical things" as "money value adjustments, distributions of hoarded wealth, methods of exchange, inter-governmental operation."[25]

MacLennan's The Watch that Ends the Night provides a much better discussion of the political situation, even though it is less explicitly political in theme. Not only is it superior in technique, but its view of the political and economic problems, as we see them in the convictions of Jerome Martel and his associates, is both well-informed and realistic, taking into account not only the practical aspects of the situation, but the personal and inter-personal relationships which are affected by their psychological impact. MacLennan does not subordinate his characters to the political considerations of his story, nor does he allow his characters to exert an artificial influence on political events. The plot develops through a logical interplay of character and situation, and the political problems are discussed, not for the sake of the discussion, but because they become the personal problems of the characters. The dilemma which faces Jerome is the same dilemma which destroys Father Dowling's peace of mind, in Callaghan's Such is My Beloved: the struggle between conflicting responsibilities. "Conscience is such an awful thing, and he has such an awful conscience,"[26] Catherine says of Jerome. It is his conscience which sends him to Spain.

> "Try and understand this -- the fascists have brought back torture, and torture calls for martyrs. And what else is fascism but the logical product of the capitalist system?"
>
> "What do you mean -- torture calls for martyrs?"
>
> "Simply this. Unless a man is able to stand up and look the torturer in the eye and say, 'I'm not afraid,' torture becomes the way of the world. It's as simple as that."
>
> "Is it really as simple as that?"
>
> "No." He shook his head impatiently. "No, because underneath it all is the plain economic exploitation of a rotten world. The communists are the only people who understand that. How can you pretend they're not one hundred percent right when they say that at a time like this the life of a single individual isn't worth a snap of the fingers? Wasn't Debs right when he said that so long as there was a soul in prison he wasn't free? What

> does a single marriage count in a balance like that? It isn't easy being me. I know what all this means." 27

So Jerome must go to Spain, because "No civilization has a chance unless it has civilized men in it who can and will fight when they have to."[28] But in order to do so he must sacrifice Catherine. "My God, George, I'd hate to hurt that woman,"[29] he says earlier, even then, when his involvement with the communists is in its early stages, beginning to see where it will lead him. But now he sees the fascists attacking the foundations of civilization, and "a handful of Spanish peasants holding out inside. They're dying for lack of medical care. So what is my duty? -- Tell me that -- what is my duty?"[30] To Jerome his duty is clear, whatever it may cost. But to Jack Christopher, a medical friend, the issues are less obvious.

> "What's got into everyone these days I don't know. This damned Spanish War, you'd think it was happening here. All these meetings where the same people tell each other the same old things. What do they know about Spain? How the hell do they know whether what they say is true or not? At best they're guessing, at worst they're saying what they like to hear. Those Spanish War meetings are like revivals in a Methodist tent. What's Spain to a man like Jerome? He's never been there. That country's always been an impossible country. What's Spain to any of these people except an excuse for them to give free play to their neuroticism?" 31

Like Monsarratt's Marcus Hendrycks, Jerome is eventually disillusioned, not in the cause of communism, but in the forces behind the conflict in Spain. The reaction is common throughout the literature. "See Russia . . . and let your theories die,"[32] an American correspondent remarks to George Stewart, and the political resolution of the novel is stated in George's words:

> In my years of work as a political commentator I have come to a conclusion which shocks some of my friends who think of politics as a rational occupation. I believe that most international crises are like gigantic mystery plays in which obscure and absolutely irrational passions are handled by politicians, and viewed by the public, in a form of ritual akin to primitive religious rites. Hardly anything anyone says or thinks in a time of political crisis is likely to be rational or a representation of the fact. The crisis is almost never about the outward things with which it professes to concern itself. Also no political crisis ever blows up quickly. It matures underground for years and months, the chemical ingredients are various and many. So it is within a nation, a human group or a city, and it often happens that the fulminate which fires the explosion is something nobody notices. We forget how in those days Spain was the stage on which a multitude of passions met. The big war which followed -- very possibly because the powers refused to face what Spain meant -- has made most of us forget what the very mention of the Spanish Civil War used to do to people's minds. It was the fulminate to so many conflicting fears and hopes that it caused explosions thousands of miles away from Madrid and Barcelona.[33]

MacLennan deals with a different aspect of the political situation in Two Solitudes. His exploration of the French-English isolations is quite apart from the depression, though he continues it through the depression period. It is the internal politics of the economic situation which impinges upon the lives of the characters in Two Solitudes

-- the impact of Huntley McQueen and his associates on the personal lives of Heather and Paul, and the economic lives of the whole community. McQueen's drowsy thoughts, just before he falls asleep, reflect the thinking of the political powers of the day -- of King, of Hoover, and of Bennett before his radical change of policy.

> Slowly McQueen's thoughts grew more placid. It was just as he had said, no country had weathered the depression the way Canada had done. Difficult times had merely weeded out what was unsound and given the good plants room in which to grow. The country was sound through and through. In any kind of crisis there were always fifty ways of making a mistake and only one way of doing the right thing. Human affairs were so mysterious it was arrogant to lay down general rules for them. The deduction was obvious -- it was the part of a prudent man to do nothing.[34]

The criticism of Huntley McQueen's policies in Two Solitudes, when they are discussed by other characters in the book, is from the personal and humane point of view rather than the political. The most pointed denunciation of McQueen and his associates, and their political and economic policies, comes from the pen of F. R. Scott. His "An Anthology of Up-to-date Canadian Poetry" which appeared in The Canadian Forum for May, 1932,[35] is a collection of short and bitter comments on the times. The following extracts are characteristic:

THE NEW PHILANTHROPY

This employer, who pays $9 a week for a
  10-hour day
Is exceedingly concerned
Lest Mr. Bennett should adopt the dole,
And so ruin the morale of the workers.

SOUND FINANCE

The great executive heads of this Company
Follow the principles of sound, conservative finance.
By reducing wages, turning workers into the streets,
And drawing upon reserves hidden away during prosperity,
They have been able to continue paying full dividends.

BRITISH TRADITIONS

Crack this man's head open with a police baton,
And send him to gaol for sedition.
He said the present economic system was rotten,
And actually told the workers they wouldn't get a square deal
Unless they organized and fought for their rights.

BIG BROTHERS

Look at this group of intelligent business men
(You know -- the kind that are really practical)
Setting up charitable organizations
To overcome some of the inevitable consequences
Of the economic system they support.

Neither the situation nor Scott's attitude to it had altered appreciably by 1935 when the Forum[36] published his "Social Notes," from which the following are taken:

STEVENS' ENQUIRY

How shocked were all the business men
When they found out how low were the wages
They had been paying their employees for years.

PROTECTION

Isn't it lucky we have such high tariffs
To protect the Canadian working-man
From having his standard of living lowered
By the competition of foreign sweat-shops?

CREDIT

This delegation of unemployed Canadians
Has just been informed
That if the Government spent any more on
relief
So that their children might be decently
clothed and fed
The credit of the country would suffer.

His final poem in this series is a disillusioned comment on human nature.

GENERAL ELECTION

There is nothing like hard times
For teaching the people to think.
By a decisive vote
After discussing all the issues
They have turned out the Conservatives
And put back the Liberals.

A similar bitter comment is the theme of a poem by Aquarius which has found its way into several anthologies of Canadian poetry.

TO A GENERATION UNEMPLOYED

In heaven they neither eat nor drink
Nor in the nether world, I think.
Neither are they in marriage given
In hell, 'tis said, nor yet in heaven.
So after four years on the dole,
Though still together, body and soul,
You're equally prepared to grace
The social life of either place.
But what a deal with death is yours
Before you reach the other shores.

Now that one generation has died to save the empire, the poem continues bitterly, there remains a second death for this generation.

So now that peace and plenty reign
Keep out of sight and don't complain
For though you live on bitter bread,
Though faith and hope are in you dead,
On charity you may rely

So do not in the body die,
For soon the guns begin, and then
There will be certain need of men.

. . . .

So lie and dream your life-in-death
Or stumble on with borrowed breath,
And I'll erect on your behalf
This temporary epitaph:
These at a time when stocks were falling,
An hour when bonds had taken flight,
Forsook their mercenary calling
And walked out blindly in the night.
They ceased to earn, and markets mended;
They starved and spared the budget grief.
We all were brave; ah! they were splendid,
And rescued business -- on relief.[37]

Earle Birney's Down the Long Table is entirely political in theme. The protagonist is a professor who is caught up by the Communist movement, carried along in its main stream for some time, and eventually disillusioned. Certainly the book is a denial of practical Communism, but this aspect is only incidental to its examination of the growth and decline of the Communist movement during the depression, in human terms, and the reasons why it was at first espoused and then abandoned by the intellectual community. It is the story of Gordon Saunders, and of his relations with the Communist Party during the thirties, told in retrospect within the framework of a congressional investigation during the anti-Communist witch hunt of the fifties. It begins with the investigation, seen through Saunders' eyes as he faces his inquisitors, and it takes us through a long flash-back into his life during the thirties, with its personal and political problems. Association with the Communist Party, in the thirties as in the fifties, carried with it social and legal ramifications which in themselves created social problems.

In Saunders, Birney has created a suitable character for his purpose. Even before he meets the Communist point of view Saunders is a rebel. He is teaching in a small Mormon college in Utah only because, in the midst of the depression, any job at all which pays a living wage must be acceptable. He is far too radical in his views to fit into the conservative religious atmosphere of the college. Already smarting from an economic situation which makes him dependent upon the good will of narrow-minded university officials, he explodes into rage when he is falsely accused of an impropriety by the Dean's son. He terminates his association with the college by telling "dear Latter-day-Saintly Dean Wollonby . . . that his son is a goddamned little liar, as well as a sneak,"[38] and departs for the University of Toronto to pursue his graduate studies there. He is a Canadian who has been out of touch with Canada and Canadian politics for the past five years. Lonesome in a strange city he approaches what proves to be a Communist gathering in a park, and is standing on the sidelines as an interested spectator when the police, with what appears to him to be unwarranted brutality, break up the meeting. This experience, added to his characteristic resentment of authority and sympathy with the oppressed, makes him a receptive listener when he meets members of the group later. He has no friends in Toronto, and they are friendly. He goes to coffee with them and is challenged by the leader of the group.

> "What is your interest in Marxism?" Good Lord, does he actually suspect me of being a police spy! Is that the only reason I dislike him? Well, what is your interest? None, you just wandered in here . . . *Looking for trouble?* No, I want to learn, all this concerns me, concerns everyone. I want to be honest.
>
> "To tell the truth I've never read Marx. Political Science, economic theory always bored me, except in Shaw perhaps. But this afternoon rather shook me because I worked in a kind of unemployed camp too once, out west; and it looks like I may be in one again before very long. Also, well, my people were working-class." Respect in their eyes, except Roberts', unfathomable. "I don't like to see people suffering unjustly, and then getting kicked around because they protest against it."

The discussion ends with an invitation to an on-campus Marxist study-class.

> "We meet weekly; tomorrow night's the next," Wilf said. He cocked his little dimpled chin at Gordon. "Would you come along if we called for you -- as our guest?" . . . What are you getting into? Say no, you fool, say you have a date. 39
>
> "Of course," Gordon said.

Without any really serious political convictions Saunders enters into a loose association with the Marxist group, and becomes a provisional member of the party. An abortive love affair with one of the girls in the group leads him into agreeing to undertake the organization of the party in Vancouver, and to Vancouver he goes, under an assumed name, working his way into various leftist groups and winning their confidence in the hope of uniting them and drawing them into the International organization.

The attempt falls apart, destroyed by dissension among the various individuals and groups involved, first at the national level and then locally. Saunders' backers in Toronto are discredited and ousted from the party, denounced as Trotskyists. Denied a charter because of their association with this counter-revolutionary group, the Vancouver members are demoralized.

> "Trotsky hafta make Fift' International. Maybe better ve stay in Fourt!"
>
> "Yeah, a Fifth! And then a Sixth, and a Sixty-Sixth! You crazy bastards! Me, I'm sticking with the Third."
>
> "You can't, you know it. It's too corrupt."
>
> "Well, then, for Christ sake, why are you against the Fourth?"
>
> "I'm not against it, but a handful of people can't declare themselves an International . . ."
>
> "Haw, but mebbe dis Toronto fallah make sense too. Time ve pulled everybody outa dat CCF outfit, like he said, dey never make a ravvalution . . ."
>
> "What was that you said Hansen? Pull everybody out of the CCF? Out of the coming mass party of Canadian socialism? Pull them into what? It's time you and the rest of you . . . got into the CCF with me where I'm fighting a lone battle, as I've told you before. All of you, the whole organization, should be in pushing the CCF toward a truly Marxist line."
>
> "Joost a bunch a Skewlmaams."[40]

The group falls apart, the members scattering to follow their separate loyalties to Marx or Trotsky or the CCF, and Saunders, who was never one of them except in the academic sense, returns to the world of the university, and to the narrow confines of the same Mormon college in Utah, where he has been reinstated through the good offices of a friend who has married the daughter of the Dean.

The story seems symbolic of the love affair between the intellectual world and the Communist party during the thirties. The attachment of the intellectuals to the Communist Party, like that of Saunders, was an intellectual attachment to the Communist ideal. When the movement was a theoretical one, untarnished by contact with the practical world, it was dedicated to principles the altruistic intellectual could hardly fail to appreciate. But once it became evident, as it did to Saunders, that the principles as translated by the various human agencies set up to put them into practice were far from ideal, and that the same corruption and self-interest which tarnished other political theories were at work within the Communist party, the charm of Communism faded and disillusionment set in. The intellectuals who had espoused the Communist cause in its infancy found, as Saunders did, that their association with it came back years later, when McCarthyism was at its height, to haunt them.

In its orientation the book is not truly Canadian, though it is written by a Canadian and set in Canada. Saunders is fleeing from an American college and returns to it after his sojourn in Canada, and the long accusing finger which is pointed at him down the long table is the finger of Uncle Sam. But the Canadian aspects of the book are no less interesting, for they offer us a glimpse of the workings of the various political forces in Canada during the thirties. The outlawing of the Communist party by the Canadian government, and the imprisonment of Tim Buck and his associates, aroused sympathy for the party among many freedom-loving Canadians, especially since they themselves were victims of the malfunction of capitalism. The problems of the police in controlling illegal political meetings, the various subterfuges employed by the outlawed organizations, the disagreements within the party and the relationship between the various leftist political movements, are viewed from the inside through the experiences of Saunders. Other books mention the Communists, the I.W.W., the radical elements working for dissension among the unemployed and the dissatisfied, but mention them as they appeared from the surface of Canadian life. Birney, in Down the Long Table, takes us underground.

Also political in theme, though much more concerned with character and action than with political theorizing, is Ted Allan's This Time a Better Earth. It is a story of the Spanish Civil War, rather than a story about Canadians during the thirties. It is, in a way, a sort of sequel to the political soul-searching in Down the Long Table, and similar, in its approach to the Spanish War, to Monsarratt's This is the Schoolroom. Allan makes no attempt to present a panoramic view of the political or the military situation in Spain. He uses a subjective approach to the war, seeing it through the eyes of Bob Curtis, who tells the story in the first person. Curtis and his friends are not so much intellectuals as idealists. And they are very human.

> We who were climbing into Spain had told ourselves that there was no place in the world for us as long as the world was what it was. But now we had a place and it frightened me because I knew that I could not laugh any more and say, what the hell.
>
> We were young enough to feel that here in Spain we would learn to know ourselves; we would find ourselves. There was more. There was the feeling that we were helping change the destiny of the world. . . .
>
> Again I thought of life back home. There had always been a sun by day and a moon and stars by night and spring came when winter was over and summer followed spring and then the leaves fell to the ground. And every year it was the same and would be the same year after year.
>
> But it was not always the same. I knew that. Men could change the world. We could change it.[41]

While the foundation of the novel is political, and its action is involved totally with the Spanish Civil War, the reader is not so much concerned with the ultimate fate of Spain as with the fate of Bob and Harry and Milty and Allan. A Better Earth is a light book, in spite of its surrounding tragedy. In terms of its view of the depression, it does little more than show us why Canadians went to Spain to fight, and what happened to them when they got there. It is closer to Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls than to any piece of Canadian fiction, but its focus is entirely on Bob Curtis and the people he loves -- none of them Spanish. It is not, in any real sense, a book about Spain, in spite of its setting, and it is political only on the most superficial level.

The novel which ranges most widely through the political background of the period is Garner's Cabbagetown. In the words of John Moss, "Garner . . . explores the implications of capitalism, fascism, communism, the tyranny of populism and of elitist socio-political structures."[42] All of these political theories Ken Tilling sees objectively, weighing them against each other. Even when the point of view is not his, the balance is maintained. Theodore East, for example, accepts without question the views of his Fascist friends, but his gullibility is countered by his father's level-headed criticism.

> "And so you think the Jews and hunkies are the ones who're making times hard?"
> "Sure they are. Everybody knows that."
> "I don't know it. I'd like to take you to one of our union study groups and let you hear some real economic theories. I don't know who the people in your club are, but it's a cinch they don't know what they're talking about."[43]

The implied criticism is very strong in the account which follows of the brutality with which the Jews are treated when Theodore's club members protest the presence of Jews in Kew Gardens. It is implied, also, in the contempt with which Ken Tilling and others from Cabbagetown condemn Theodore as a snob.

The breadth of political vision is continued through Ken's association with Noah Masterson, whose varied experiences and independent mind do much to provide background for Ken's political thinking.

> "What are you politically?" Ken asked him.
>
> Noah leaned back in his chair and polished his glasses with a teatowel. "I guess I'm what can be called a tired radical now. At one time I was a member of the Socialist Labour Party."
>
> "I met an ex-Wobbly, just like you, in the Rupert Street cells in Winnipeg," Ken said, interrupting.
>
> "There's still a few of us old moss-backs around, but both of those parties are dead. It was great while it lasted though." He tilted his head back and shook it in bewildered thought. "They were the only real native North-American radical movements," he said. "Later I joined the Socialist Party. I was an organizer in Pittsburgh for them, for a while, before 1914."
>
> "How do you stand today?"
>
> "I guess I'm still a socialist, though I haven't much use for that new CCF Party. Too many ex-preachers in the ranks, too many fruity professors. They want to change the working stiff's morals more than they want to fill his belly. They're against beer, against gambling, and for all I know maybe they're against screwing -- all the pleasures, the free pleasures of the poor, the last one anyway, as Bernard Shaw says.
>
> I've no love for the Communist established church, or for its Trotskyite opponents either . . . . The whole Communist movement is breaking up into evangelical sects: Trotskyites, Fieldites, Lovestoneites. They're getting harder to keep track of than the Protestants." . . .
>
> Ken smiled. "What radical party will end up on top?" he asked.
>
> "Stalin's gang will, I think. They're the best organized, and they have the Soviet treasury behind them. As for me I haven't liked any Soviet group since they shot down the sailors of Kronstadt in 1921." 44

The broad political background of the book comes partly from the fact that there are many characters like Noah who discuss their varied political views, but it is the critical thinking of Tilling himself which sets the political tone. He is, as Moss observes, an acute observer of the socio-political movements of the period, although he does not participate in them.

> Ken Tilling called himself a cynic, though his political concepts leaned toward the anarcho-syndicalism of the Wobblies. He had taken part in a few eviction fights, but as a noncommitted individual. As a natural loner he sympathized with the friendless and helpless, but refused to join any group. He had transferred his cynical distrust and hatred of the bureaucrat, the YMCA secretary, the Bible-thumper, and all their middleclass minions, into a distrust of politicians of all political hues and aims. 45

At the end of the book, when Tilling commits himself to participation in the Spanish Civil War, he still remains aloof from the shackles of party affiliation, his commitment philosophical and humane rather than political.

> "I don't care what you think of the Communists, or how you dislike their theories," he would say. "Maybe they are opportunists and dupes of the Russian government. But right now, when every member of every working class in the world should be behind the Spanish people, they're the only ones who are doing anything concrete to help them. I don't care what their motives are. To hell with the motives."
>
> "We'll see," Noah would say quietly, "We'll see." 46

But for Ken the time for waiting is past. He explains his position to a companion.

> "I don't see why you're so interested in the Spaniards, Tilling," Barney would say. "I say the Royal Navy should go down there and blast both sides off the face of the map."
>
> "That's the trouble with people in this country," Ken would answer. "You'll wait until Hitler and the other fascists are right here outside your door, before you'll even bother finding out what it's all about."
>
> To him the Loyalists were fighting for the things he most believed in, while he was four thousand miles from the fighting,

> bagging raisins and beans. . . . The last battle between the workers and the fascist reactionaries had begun. It was time now to put aside the political theorizing of the Stracheys, Laskys and Shaws, the proletarian editorials of Mike Gold and the intellectual Commies of the New Masses, the pamphlets of Engels and Proudhon. Those who really believed in a better world were already manning the barricades blocking the entrance of the four columns of professionals, Moors and fascists advancing on Madrid. 47

The final word, as we leave Ken Tilling in Spain preparing to go into battle, is bitter.

> "None of them knew it then, but they were already doomed to defeat, not by Spanish fascism, or Hitler, but by the machinators in Whitehall, the Quai d'Orsay and on Washington's Capitol Hill." 48

The bitterness, a reaction to the same situation, is echoed in a poem by L. A. MacKay, writing under the pseudonym of John Smalacombe:

THREE SNARLS
OF A DISGUSTED COLONIAL

I.
Freedom, in Spain, exhaled a groan.
Her champion, England, scribbling notes,
Refused as yet to throw a stone,
And only held the stoners' coats.

II.
O Ananias! what a waste!
Iscariot too! such gifts misplaced!
For, living now, you'd both be set
To shine in Britain's cabinet.

III.
Let Britain's leaders, if they choose,
Be cushions for Benito's hips,
And lick the heels of Adolf's shoes:
But damn them! must they smack their lips? 49

Dr. Norman Bethune, who wrote the following poem, left a lucrative position as chief thoracic surgeon of

Sacred Heart Hospital in Montreal and consulting chest specialist for the Canadian Department of Pensions and National Health, to travel to Spain in the summer of 1936 and work without salary with the International Committee for the Aid of Spanish Democracy. It was he who was responsible for the formation of the blood transfusion service in Spain which came to be known as the Canadian Blood Trust, and was responsible for saving the lives of many wounded soldiers and civilians.[50] He appears briefly in MacLennan's The Watch that Ends the Night, as a fellow worker of Jerome in a Montreal hospital, and the organizer of the blood donor unit which Jerome joins in Spain.

RED MOON

And this same pallid moon tonight,
    Which rides so quietly, clear and high,
The mirror of our pale and troubled gaze,
    Raised to a cool Canadian sky.

Above the shattered Spanish mountain tops
    Last night, rose low and wild and red,
Reflecting back from her illumined shield,
    The blood bespattered faces of the dead.

To that pale disc, we raise our clenched fists
    And to those nameless dead our vows renew,
"Comrades, who fought for freedom and the
        future world,
    Who died for us, we will remember you."[51]

The author of the following poem, who uses only L. for a signature, takes a lighter approach to international politics, and brings the conflict back to home territory.

SONG FOR A REAL UNITED FRONT

To the Lords of the Kremlin 'twas Braunstein
who spoke,
"I'll set Russia free from your tyrannous
yoke;
"So each bold saboteur who loves Marx and
loves me,
"Let him follow the bonnets of Bonnie
Trotskee."

In answer to this 'twas Djugushvili said,
"This fellow was never a genuine Red;
"No traitor to me knows what Marx meant
to mean,
"So up with the bonnets of Bonnie Stalin!"

Come, comrades, no quarrels! We'll wish you
both luck,
(Singing: Hey for the bonnets of Bonnie
Tim Buck!)
And while we're about it, we'll make the
sky ring
For Bonnie Dick Bennett, and Bonnie Bill
King. 52

However ubiquitous the political references and discussions may be in the non-prairie literature, they do not provide as strong or as universal a theme as the discussions of poverty. This is a constantly recurring topic in most of the literature, and a main preoccupation of the best of it. The poverty comes in various ways; suddenly to some, who find their circumstances drastically altered by the depression, gradually to others who find their incomes reduced bit by bit until finally they dwindle away altogether. To some, poverty is a new and traumatic experience; others have lived their lives in poverty, and experience the depression only as an intensifying of the problems to which they have long become accustomed.

The poverty itself and its psychological effects provide the basic theme of the literature, but there are minor aspects which appear frequently enough to merit attention. One, already noticed in American literature, is the reaction of the individual who is more fortunate than others, to the suffering and privation he sees around him. This is apparent in both MacLennan's Two Solitudes and Callaghan's Such is My Beloved, both novels which provide for a contrast between the lives of the comfortable and of the deprived.

McQueen's view of the situation, in Two Solitudes, is typical of many individuals in the established business world.

> Faintly, like the snore of an enormous beast he had managed to control but still distrusted, the noise of the city stole up the hill, through the branches of the trees into his windows. It was a minor sound at this hour of the night, intermittent and far away.
>
> He turned his thoughts back to unemployment and the aspects of the subject which he must handle in the paper for the literary club. In the whole country there were now a million and a half souls on direct relief, one-seventh of the nation. Yet in spite of this total, the country remained quiet. There were no riots anywhere, and there had never been any nonsense like the New Deal. It gave McQueen a feeling of intense personal satisfaction.
>
> His success had been so unbroken, his business judgement so sure, his nose for the market so acute, that he saw no reason to doubt his conclusions about anything. Take the working classes. One was supposed to feel sorry for them, but candidly McQueen believed that their troubles were of their own making. They never saved their money and their morality could be a great deal

> better than it was. They were also lazy; it was their laziness which prevented them from becoming a menace. They moiled about in the lower street of Montreal, but they never thought of climbing the hill across the frontier of Sherbrooke street to see for themselves the comfort in which business leaders were able to live. Even though the socialists were throwing mud at men like himself, even at men like General Methuen, the working classes didn't seem to care. They probably knew it was not his fault that they were out of work.

Even though he disclaims responsibility for unemployment, McQueen, characteristically, is not slow to make use of it.

> Then he heard the whisper of the sprayer saturating his lawn and he made a clucking noise with his tongue. He would have to speak to the gardener about it in the morning; the man was getting careless. This was the second time in a month he had forgotten to turn it off. He must be reminded that jobs were very scarce these days.[53]

Heather, English-Canadian, reaching maturity during the thirties, was born and brought up in the McQueen world, and has lived there all her life except for brief intervals she spent with her grandfather in Saint Marc, but she is by nature much closer akin to her grandfather's world than to her mother's. Her mother, Janet, unthinkingly transfers the source to which she looks for her ideas from her husband Harvey, to his family, to McQueen, and accepts their decisions without question. If she takes her personal values from them, it is not surprising that she accepts from them, also, their evaluation of the economic situation, and its social implications. Daphne, Heather's sister, too clever to question a situation which is to her own advantage, and too shallow to be touched by its moral implications, remains also within the confines of the Methuen society. But Heather is too much related to her grandfather to accept the paradoxes of Montreal life without question. Even before she becomes emotionally involved with Paul she is restive, questioning the justice and logic of a society which denies her the right to her own self expression. The explosive protest "It's not fair!" applies equally to her situation, as to Paul's. "I wouldn't know a choke wire from -- from a magneto" she says regretfully, and when he replies bitterly, "Why should you? You'd only put garage hands out of work if you did," she protests,

> "There's something the matter with that remark, Paul. . . . It shouldn't be economically necessary for people to be helpless. . . . I'm ashamed not to know anything about the car I drive." 54

Yet she, perhaps even more than Paul, is troubled by the inequalities of the economic situation. He, having overcome bitterness, is free to work out his own salvation; any activity on her part can only serve to compound the evil.

> "You English have always been on top of the world. You don't know the feeling of the strait-jacket."
> "Do you feel in a strait-jacket?"
> "In a couple of them. If you have no money you're always in one. But a French-Canadian is born in one." 55

Later, Heather picks up his protest.

> "You don't have to be French-Canadian to be born in a strait-jacket. Every girl's born in one, unless you're a girl like Daffy."

She could have added that wealth, like poverty, can be a strait-jacket as well.

> "Huntly McQueen said I thought it was my duty to be miserable on account of the unemployed."
>
> Paul sat down on the chair again and looked at her intently. "From what I've heard of McQueen, I'd hate to agree with him, but he's got something all the same. You haven't lived a rotten life. People haven't been rotten to you. Why feel guilty about it?"
>
> "I don't. You don't understand at all. People have been altogether too nice to me."
>
> He laughed shortly and she tossed her head. "Don't despise me Paul. It's not my fault if I've never had to worry where my next meal was coming from." 56

Her dilemma comes out clearly in an earlier passage.

> It was not yet eight o'clock. Stores and offices were not open, but a trickle of shabby men flowed down the sidewalks on either side of the street, hands in pockets, clothes looking as if they had been rained on, some without collars or ties. Many of them were her own age. She felt acutely uncomfortable as she drove past them. If she had earned the money that purchased her car she would have felt a little better, but she had never earned a cent in her life. She wished she could help people like these men, but there seemed no way of doing so. The idea of serving in a canteen supported by the Junior League had revolted her after a week of working in one. Girls who spent more money on their complexions than these men spent on food for their families, flattered their egos by passing out hand-outs to the unemployed in their spare time. The implicit insult had horrified Heather; she had seen the sardonic glances of some of the men she had served. Lots of the girls were completely sincere about it, but to Heather the whole notion of charity was repulsive. There seemed no excuse for girls like herself to exist so long as there was any need for charity. McQueen would say it was the men's own fault; he would add that they should have saved their money when they had it. 57

The Robisons, in Callaghan's Such is My Beloved, react to the situation differently. There is little that Heather can do to mitigate the injustice which makes her uncomfortable; the Robisons are in a position to offer the two prostitutes, Midge and Ronnie, the help which Father Dowling, as a representative of their church, requests, but they are unwilling to make the sacrifice. Mrs. Robison, like McQueen, retreats behind the comfortable barrier of social class; her husband wavers, and passes the decision back to the church, which sacrifices moral principles to expediency. The Bishop, in making the decision, is not comfortable in his own mind. Like the landowners in The Grapes of Wrath he sees the victims of the depression as a threat -- a threat to the security of the Church -- and he sacrifices them in order to protect its interests. And like the comfortable elements of society throughout the country, who saw their position threatened by the poverty of others, he turned to the forces of law and order for protection, placing the economic security of his Church before any consideration of justice or morality.

This religious dilemma is a prime concern in Callaghan's book. Prostitution is sinful, but what if the only alternative is starvation? And what if those in whose hands the only solution rests, those who control the economic factors, refuse to act? Whose is the greater sin? "It ought to be easy for everyone to have a job and plenty of everything, but people like Huntly McQueen just sit on their tails and do nothing,"[58] Paul says to Heather. It is perhaps true in Two Solitudes; indeed it is a deliberate policy of McQueen.[59] The one time McQueen departs from this policy, when he attempts to interfere between Paul and Heather, he is frustrated by Paul's refusal to accept his proffered bribe. But the people like McQueen in Callaghan's book -- those who control the money and the jobs which might have rescued Midge and Ronnie from destruction -- are not content with idleness. Father Dowling's association with the two girls poses a threat, which stirs the powerful to action. Mrs. Robison, too narrow and shallow to be important herself, still represents society's outraged action when it is forced to recognize a situation it cannot passively condone -- the reaction of that segment of society which is not so much unwilling to accept responsibility for the misery of the poor, as incapable of understanding that responsibility. But there is no lack of understanding in Mr. Robison or the Bishop. Both are touched by Father Dowling's unification of human and divine love, and neither is comfortable in his role of executioner. But it is the role which their society demands of them, and they accept their responsibility to this society, in spite of their uneasy suspicion that in doing so they are compounding a moral injustice. The process of rationalization is effective for them; for Father Dowling there is no rationalization. His heart and his conscience demand of him one duty; his church demands another. Unable to reject either demand he sinks into madness, surfacing only in the one secure element in his life: the essential unity of the love which is both human and divine, and for him the manifestation of God in human life. In this one area of solid ground he can emerge into sanity. The impossibility of putting his knowledge to practical application in the real world has been demonstrated to him; his madness relieves him of the necessity of any further attempt.

In a sense Callaghan's novel, too, is a story of man in a strait-jacket. Father Dowling is constrained to the point of madness by the conflict between his church's view of his duty to God, and his own. The Bishop, too, is bound, as is Mr. Robison, though neither struggles noticeably for freedom. The bondage, even when not resisted, is irritating. "There was something so direct, simple and confident about the young priest that the Bishop grew even more irritated."[60] As he listens to Father Dowling, the young priest's sincerity is obvious, and the conflict it entails, between the ideal and the practical application of Christian love, becomes correspondingly more difficult to ignore.

> The bishop seemed to become more sullen than ever but really it was only that his conscience was bothering him. One part of his mind was telling him that the young priest was utterly without blame; the other part of his mind was urging him to be rational, to be firm, to administer his office according to

> his highest conception of duty. While he was looking so sullen and uncommunicative, he was fearing he was softening, yielding to a personal sentiment, or liking the young priest and letting himself meditate on his conduct whereas he knew definitely, as a bishop, that such conduct could not be tolerated in this community. Besides there was also the charity drive throughout the city that would be spoiled by circulation of scandalous stories about priests. 61

Whatever doubts the Bishop may have had are dispelled by the light of practical common sense, and he relaxes into the security of his official strait-jacket. But the security is a false one, and his doubts return to plague him at the moment of confession.

> It was then that he realized he was thinking of Father Dowling as though he loved and wanted to help him. This startled the Bishop. Don't I believe in my own actions? I know he was giving scandal. There was nothing else to do. . . . A feeling stronger than his reason was urging him that his doubt and perplexity was a matter for his spiritual adviser. He seemed to be trying to grip and hold his own conscience, refusing to let himself reconsider his judgement of Father Dowling. "My own conscience must give me the answer in these questions," he thought.

But the more he ponders the problem, the more he comes face to face with Father Dowling's own dilemma.

> "Father Dowling in the beginning may have loved them in a general way, and, of course, that was good. His love for them became too concrete. How could it become too concrete?" "From the general to the particular, the word made flesh, no, no, nonsense . . . the general made concrete . . . no, no." . . . Up and down the room he paced restlessly, feeling sure that as a rational man there had been only one way to consider the question of Father Dowling's conduct. "If I had it to do over again, I would face the problem in exactly the same

> way," he thought firmly. "What on earth is bothering me then? He was an honest man who committed himself to a piece of folly that can't be tolerated, that's all there is to it."
>
> The Bishop paced up and down irritably in this way, muttering to himself about Father Dowling, while his spiritual adviser was still waiting to hear his confession. 62

However concerned the Bishop may be by his treatment of Father Dowling, he gives no second thought to his treatment of Midge and Ronnie, or to their probable fate. Without hesitation, without remorse, he condemns them to the fate from which Father Dowling was trying to save them.

> "By the way, Mr. Robison, you have possibly some connection through the courts with the police?"
>
> "You're suggesting, Your Grace . . ."
>
> "Dear me, it's hard to say what to do. It's a pity the police wouldn't arrest the girls and get them out of the way. Maybe we ought to pray for that."
>
> "We will, Your Grace." 63

Whatever sin may have been involved in the Bishop's treatment of Father Dowling is, by comparison, a minor one, but in all the searchings of conscience which cause him such discomfort on the eve of confession there is no mention of the most glaring sin of all. In the matter of Midge and Ronnie his conscience is untroubled, a fact which condemns him utterly and condemns also, by implication, the church he represents, and the organized churches as a whole, which place expediency before Christian love at the individual level, before concern for common humanity.

This, I think, is the problem which concerns Callaghan in this novel, and it is one he fails to resolve. For the sincere Christian, he suggests, the dilemma can end only in madness. And thus in its very theme the novel is essentially a novel of the depression, for this is the problem that the depression placed squarely upon the conscience of every individual who professed Christianity. Christian love demands that those who have shall share with those who have not, willingly and without stint. But those who have are not willing to make the sacrifice, and those who have not do not expect the sacrifice to be made. Nor do they want the sacrifice. The word "charity" has lost its old connotation of unselfish love, and has taken on the taint of condescension. Heather rejects the charity offered by the Junior League because it contains no love. Midge and Ronnie would accept the help of Father Dowling, for his motives are sincere, but they would have rejected charity from Mrs. Robison, even if it had been forthcoming, preferring rather to rely on their own shoddy alternative. And no one, except the innocent and unworldly Father Dowling, really expects Christian love to operate, as a principle, in a practical world. Rich and poor alike agree with the Bishop. The charity drive must not be jeopardized; the prudent man must do nothing; there is no other point of view for the sensible man.

Paradoxically, it is only Charlie, the atheist, who is free to entertain Father Dowling's radical Christian views. Unhampered by responsibility for the welfare of the church or state, unencumbered by sacred precepts or by an accumulation of possessions, Charlie appears to be free of the strait-jacket. Even his poverty does nothing to limit his freedom of thought. In his company Father Dowling is liberated too, and can give expression to his doubts.

> "I wouldn't say it to everybody, Charlie, but I know many respectable women in the parish enjoying marriages of convenience and I know they're just as low in the scale as these girls."[64]

This hypocrisy on the part of church adherents and church officials draws the fire of others besides Callaghan. F. R. Scott does not forget the clergy.

EXPERT ADVICE

Have you ever noticed
How many members of monastic orders
Who have taken perpetual vows
Of poverty
And chastity
Now spend their time defending private property
And urging the poor to have large families?

OBSERVATION

In tonight's newspaper
There were two protests:
One by an Archbishop
Against the spread of communism,
And one by an unemployed man
Who said his children were sleeping four in a bed
To keep warm.[65]

The hypocrisy of the godly and the comfortable is rooted in fear. Around them, as the depression deepened, economic distinctions upon which the circumstances of their lives depended were disappearing. They saw their friends and associates reduced to poverty, business men accustomed to economic independence standing in the bread lines shoulder-to-shoulder with those they had previously employed. It was only natural that they should resist a levelling tendency which, by implication, threatened them with the same fate.

The psychological aspects of this levelling tendency provide a second minor poverty-related theme in the literature. Where the alteration in circumstances is extreme, as it is in the lives of upper-class people like Monsarratt's Marcus Hendrycks, or the Wall street casualties in the American news reports, or the white-collar unemployed who crowd the New York rest rooms in Wolfe's You Can't Go Home Again, its effect is dramatic. Where the change is less dramatic it is no less real, and even those accustomed to poverty, who have nothing to fear from economic levelling, find their lives affected by it. Ken Tilling, looking over the line waiting for relief rations, comments mentally, "It wasn't only Cabbagetown and the West-End slums that were represented in the relief lines now. It seemed that the depression, as it was beginning to be called, was, like a war or revolution, a leveller of the population."[66] The force touches his own life when Myrla Patson's family, several rungs above the Tillings on the social and economic ladder when he first meets them, sinks into the same despondent poverty to which the Tillings are accustomed. Myrla herself plunges even more drastically. Calling for her for their first date, Ken considers her far above him.

> On the way to the Leroy house on the streetcar Ken fought an urge to get off and walk back to Cabbagetown. Why should a beautiful girl like her go out with a poor skinny little runt of nineteen who had nothing better to offer than a thirty-five cent movie. Several suitors must have called her up since he'd seen her last, asking her for dates. 67

Her surroundings add to his concept of the distance between them.

> Ken gazed around him at the most wonderful kitchen he'd ever seen outside the movies. Everything was painted green and white with built-in cupboards and counters, and a green clock set in a china plate ticked away pontifically. There were a white electric stove and fridge, and even radiators under the windows. Until then Ken had never really thought of a kitchen being heated by anything but its stove. 68

By the time the depression has run its course the positions are reversed, and it is Myrla who considers herself unworthy of Ken's notice, and Ken who looks down at her with compassion. As might be expected, the levelling trend of the depression was generally downward. Improvement in the circumstances of an individual is usually attributable to some artificial element. Those who escape the poverty of Saint Henri in Gabrielle Roy's _The Tin Flute_, for instance, are rescued by the war; George Stewart, in _The Watch that Ends the Night_, achieves prosperity through the good offices of a friend; his friend Arthur Lazenby, like Garner's Theodore East, escapes the downward pull of the depression by currying favour with influential friends. For one reason or another the depression was a time of changed circumstances for many, and the resulting variations in relationships form a significant pattern throughout the literature.

These are side glances, however, at the effects of the poverty that was the depression's hallmark. The poverty itself, whether the depression created it or simply made escape from it impossible, is the chief concern of the depression literature of the industrial areas. Seen from a distance, its victims are viewed with compassion, as in E. J. Pratt's poem "The Depression Ends," in which he describes a celestial feast to which he would invite

> Only the faithful, the elect --
> The shabby ones of earth's despite,
> The victims of her rude neglect,
> The most unkempt and motley throng
> Ever described in tale or song. . . .
> No one should come who never knew
> A famine day or rationed gruel,
> Nor heard his belly like a flue
> Roaring with wind instead of fuel.[69]

His "Prayer Medley" is less fanciful, more critical, but it lacks the satiric bite of Scott's criticism. It is a long poem, cast in the form of a rhythmic psalm of praise for the progress of mankind through the ages, interrupted periodically by passages of abrupt vigorous verse glancing at the evils which have accompanied the progress. It concludes,

> Our physicians can prescribe for the ills
>   of their families.
> They can cure individual diseases, and heal
>   the hurt of the body.
> But they have found no remedy for the deep
>   malaise in the communal heart of the
>   world.

> Our father who art in heaven. . . .
> Give us this day our daily bread and forgive
>   us our trespasses
> For we do not forgive those who trespass
>   against us.[70]

The same elements of compassion and social criticism emerge in Nathaniel A. Benson's "Depression Chants," which begins:

> The men of honour marched away,
> Full twenty years ago
> Brave in the ardour of a day,
> Full bravely to a show.
>
> The men of honour tramp to-day
> On soleless, shambling feet,
> Tramps who like heroes marched away[71]
> To death, denied and sweet.

None of these poems deals with the day-to-day life of the poor, nor does MacLennan in Two Solitudes, even though he uses the psychological impact of poverty as a main theme. MacLennan uses the intellectual, rather than the emotional, approach. Paul and Heather, facing separation for years and perhaps forever, discuss their problems.

> "We don't have to pretend with each other, Heather. I've worn out a lot of shoes looking for jobs in the past year. I don't have to remind you of that."
>
> "It's not fair. It's not fair!"
>
> "Facts and fairness have nothing to do with each other. If it weren't for all the doors that have closed in my face, I'd be able to say a lot of things to you now . . . that I can't."[72]

Paul forms a link between the solitudes of poverty and affluence in the novel, just as he links the French and English solitudes. He combines lack of money with education and good breeding; he has experienced the frustrations of unemployment, but he has the wit and ingenuity to escape from it. His education and good breeding raise him above the level of Saint-Henri's poor, and his experience of poverty separates him from Mount Royal. Even if the circumstances of his life had made it possible, he could never have accepted McQueen's philosophy of inactivity, and he was insulated from the destruction which overcame the more poverty-ridden inhabitants of Saint-Henri by both his character and his background. Yet the depression has not left him unmarked. He is, in a sense, typical of the youth of the thirties, standing at what is usually referred to as the threshhold of life, and finding that it leads nowhere.

> He stood irresolute, running his hand through his hair. He had no place to go. It was not a new situation. The places he had to go were always temporary places: way-stations on the road through to somewhere else. He thought of some of them: schools, hockey practices, games when the players' entrance to the rink was dark under arc lamps on cold winter nights, the spectators lining up under the bright lights in front, and then the hundreds of tight moments before the game started with the teams posed in the area ringed by the crowds: stores where he had worked delivering parcels in his mid-teens in the summer; the train that had taken him north to the construction gang that summer when he was eighteen; that other train with the black leather seats in the colonists' car when he had gone west for the harvesting the year following, across Ontario and Manitoba to Saskatchewan. All those places to go, even the hockey, had been to get an education. They had provided the money for it. It was now, with exams over and a degree in his pocket, that he really had no place to go. . . .
>
> Paul's thoughts gathered themselves. He had things to do and a lifetime would not be long enough to do them properly. He had seen a second-hand portable typewriter in a store

> on Craig Street the other day. At the time he had counted his money to see if he could afford it and decided he would have to get a job first. The Corona would have to wait, like everything else he wanted these days. Again, like guilt in the conscience, the sequence of the last few years renewed itself: doors closing in his face, the regretful smiles of older, well-established men; the knowledge eating into himself and into millions of others month by month and year by year that nobody wanted them, nobody could find a use for them.[73]

Ronnie and Midge belong to the same generation as Paul -- the generation which emerged from childhood into a world which neither wanted nor needed them, and offered them nothing. They took what they could find, of necessity, and they are no more to be blamed for the misery of their circumstances than is Heather for the luxury of hers. We see in them, as we do in Gabrielle Roy's Florentine, the crippling effects of poverty on the moral and mental development of the individual.

This is the aspect of the situation which MacLennan emphasizes in The Watch that Ends the Night. George Stewart has little in common with Midge and Ronnie, but he, too, is a product of the depression. MacLennan acknowledges at the very outset its importance on George's character, and on the development of the story.

> Now I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is George Stewart and I come from what might be called an old Montreal family. But I also come from an impoverished family, and even now I think of myself as a product not only of Montreal but also of the depression, scarred by it like so many of my friends. For this intricate, fostering [sic] city was a bad place in the depression. . . .

> I have never felt safe. Who of my age could, unless he was stupid? Quite a few people thought me successful, but in my own eyes I was no more successful than the old Greek who pushed boulders up the hill knowing they would tumble down the moment they reached the top. Some people thought me calm, but inside I knew I was not. I have often heard myself described as a "mature" commentator, but I have never seemed mature to myself. The young seem more so because they know nothing of the 1930's. The young have the necessary self-confidence and ignorance to feel mature, and that is why I like them so much better than I like my own generation. Was there ever a crowd like ours? Was there ever a time when so many people tried, so pathetically, to feel responsible for all mankind? Was there ever a generation which yearned to belong, so unsuccessfully, to something larger than themselves? 74

George, protesting the economic situation, gives voice to the hopelessness which overcame that generation.

> There'll never be the slightest hope of anything improving until the whole system is changed. Here we are -- for the first moment in history we are really able to abolish poverty. But there's never been so much poverty as now. Have you seen it? Have you seen the men riding the rods? Have you seen the flat cars crossing the prairies loaded with unemployed? Meanwhile . . . look at this city with the same people sitting on top of the nation's wealth like incubating hens. I saw in the paper this morning that Huntly McQueen's worked another merger. Yesterday there was a housing riot in Saint-Henri and when the police arrested the poor devils the jail was the first roof they'd had over their heads in weeks. Nobody does a thing.

George's experiences in search of work parallel those we find recounted in all books of the period.

> That summer I walked the sidewalks day after day, I searched the want-ads and soon gave up because no employer even bothered to advertise for help. I found nothing to do, absolutely nothing. I applied to every

> teacher's agency in Canada and to half a dozen in the United States. I made a few semi-friends about the town, but most of the time I was alone. . . .

The loneliness and the rejection are the most devastating aspects of the depression experience.

> I learned the bitter language and thoughts of the period, as any sensitive man was bound to in time when his elders and leaders betrayed him. I learned to profess a blanket hatred for whole human groups, to talk wildly about politics and to encourage others to do the same. 75

Even when one has work, it may improve one's economic situation without removing the psychological frustration.

> "Where's Harry?" I said as I sat down and lit a cigarette.
>
> "He's out. It so happens that he's got a job at last."
>
> "That's wonderful."
>
> Norah sat opposite me with her slim thighs pressed together and pain in those large brown eyes. "He's an usher in the Capitol!" she said in the tone a wife might use if she said "He's dead," or "He's just been arrested."
>
> "Well, at least it's a job."
>
> "But he wants to work, George. He wants a real job, not to show stupid people to their seats at escapist movies. Harry's a wonderful electrical engineer. Everyone underrates him because he hasn't had a job lately and has never had a chance."
>
> This was news to me and I said so.
>
> "He's so modest he never talks about himself," said Norah, "but he had two years in Engineering and he had to leave college because there was no money. In Russia a man like Harry would be appreciated. Technicians are given a chance in Russia." 76

It is this book, perhaps more than any other Canadian novel, which looks back at the depression experience and weighs it with the objectivity which only distance makes possible.

> Never before was Montreal as it was in the Thirties and it will never be like that again. The unemployed used to flow in two rivers along St. Catherine Street, and I used to see eddies of them stopping in front of shop windows to stare at the goods they could not buy. There was a restaurant that used to roast chickens in the window over electrically operated spits, and there were always slavering men outside staring at the crinkling skin of the chickens and the sputtering fat. I remember how silent the unemployed were when they emerged after a snowfall to clean the streets, often without mittens on their hands, and how pitiful their cheap worn shoes looked. And above all do I remember my own guilt as I saw them, for I had work and they had none.[77]

Much of the literature does deal with the day-to-day lives of the poor, representing poverty in the experiences and reactions of the characters rather than discussing it in the abstract. The short magazine fiction of the period frequently uses the isolated tragic incident as a theme. The Forum published two dismal tales which are typical. "Bread Line," by Maurice Lesser, tells of a man waiting in a queue for a bowl of stew and an overcoat, finding coincidentally that the overcoat he receives is one which had been his own, made to order with a secret pocket in the lining where he had always kept a crisp new $100 bill for emergencies.

> His questing fingers slid into the cunningly hidden little pocket. Over, and over, some machine-like part of him was praying -- Oh, dear God let it be there, don't let anyone else -- suddenly, he felt the wadded crispness of paper under his hand; abruptly he stopped praying. He almost shrieked with relief. His head felt bulged with a swift rush of blood as he forced his way to the door.

> The night air felt clean and almost wine-like -- and now, for no reason that he could think of, Cheever felt himself running. Great, sobbing breaths worked up from his empty stomach and racked him. He was thinking as he ran, in pictures of food, baths, clean linen. All these things, right under his hand. The thought slowed him.
>
> Pantingly, he stopped under a light. His groping hand, clutched the little bit of crisp paper. Fumblingly, he drew it toward him. Straightened out, it read -- 'Good for one Meal, and One night's Lodging at the Lighthouse Rescue Station.' 78

"The Wheels Squeaked" is an equally cheerless tale by Yvonne Firkins, of an unemployed man who is looking after the baby while his wife works. Taking the child for a walk, the father is embarrassed by the fact that the squeaky wheels of the perambulator draw attention to him, advertising his situation to everyone within ear shot, so that he walks unthinking into the traffic.

> "When did you first see him?" asked the coroner of the young man with the dark hair and the square shouldered overcoat.
>
> "I noticed him going down the street on the opposite side to me just before . . . before it happened . . . The driver hadn't a chance. The man never even looked at the traffic signal he just walked right ahead as though he wasn't thinking . . . walked right into the side of the truck." 79

"She Couldn't Cry," by T. Farah combines poverty and labor relations with incest in its theme. The story takes place in the mind of Dorothy, who sits beside her father's coffin, numb and emotionally exhausted, looking at the people gathered for his wake with disgust, and pondering her own lack of grief.

> Ike [her father] had been working as a strikebreaker at the foundry and the strikers had gone in to clean out the scabs. There was fighting all over the place with lead pipes and clubs and Ike was chased up on the roof by some strikers and he was hit on the head and beaten and they found him dead on the roof. 80

The setting of the story, like that of Cabbagetown, is the depression in the midst of slum conditions, and the circumstances of Ike's death are appropriate for the period. But these are not the theme of the story. Attention is focused on the psychological effects on the girl of her father's unnatural interest in her. His death has released her, not only from fear of him, but from its effects on her emotional development. "Her hatred of kissing was dead, just as Ike was dead."

Dorothy Livesay's story, "A Cup of Coffee," in the Canadian Bookman, is a story of parents who have separated. The mother supports the child, resenting the fact that her husband contributes nothing. At a chance meeting the husband suggests a solution: his relatives are willing to give the child a good home. Shock and terror at the thought of losing her child break down the woman's cold resentment for a moment, and the husband comforts her. The incident brings about a better understanding, before they part once more, the woman to return to her search for employment, the man to pay the 15¢ bill and speculate that this leaves him "two bits for the rest of the day."[81] The story is a brief and moving psychological study, by far the most effective of the four. The poverty theme is best exposed, however, in Garner's Cabbagetown and Gabrielle Roy's The Tin Flute, the one set in a Toronto slum during the depression, the other dealing with the effects of the depression on the lives of slum dwellers in Montreal. Both novels demonstrate the self-perpetuating aspect of poverty; this is a basic theme of The Tin Flute. Cabbagetown, concerned with a comprehensive view of life in the thirties, deals with poverty as an intrinsic part of that life.

Its effect on Garner's characters is as varied as the characters themselves. Ken Tilling, strong in the independence of his own character, suffers no serious damage; his mother is destroyed. Myrla Patson slides slowly down to the social depths; Theodore East, though his morals may be no more admirable, pulls himself up in society. The debilitating effects of poverty are best illustrated by an incident which appears to have been included for that purpose.

> When Ken began working at the soap works Mabel Tilling stopped drinking, for the first time in years. The neighbours were surprised but not half as surprised as she was herself. . . .
>
> The energies that Mabel had spent on drinking were now sublimated in work, and she bustled around the house cleaning and scouring and fixing things that she had ignored up to then. Ken came home to find a hot meal waiting for him, had a lunch of sandwiches put up for him every night and had his clothes washed, ironed and mended as they had never been before.
>
> Mabel spent most of Ken's ten-dollar board money on food and little odds and ends they had needed so long around the house.

> She became a regular Monday evening patron of the Idle Hour theatre, and every week brought home a piece of chinaware to add to their almost non-existent stock of dishes. She bought herself a second-hand winter coat at a rummage sale at King Street Presbyterian Church, and a Mrs. Audrey Bainbridge, the wife of the minister there, gave her a job doing her washing and ironing one day a week for two dollars and her carfare. Each week she hid the two dollars away to save for Christmas.
>
> Mabel's sobriety melted the puffiness from her face and neck, and she told everyone she hadn't felt so good in years. On Thursdays she and Mrs. Bainbridge, who was a few years younger than Mabel, talked about the small towns each of them had come from, chattering away like schoolgirls about their younger days in the country. It felt a little odd to be treated as an equal by a minister's wife, but it only pointed out to Mabel what a waste her life had lately become, before she gave up the booze. 82

Then the fact that Ken is working is reported to the welfare authorities, and Mabel finds that their relief will be cut to compensate for Ken's meagre salary. She takes little comfort from the fact that her misery has company.

> "How do they expect people to get on their feet?" Mabel asked nobody in particular. "You start to get a few things, and save a few dollars for Christmas, and then they cut you off." 83

The welfare worker is sympathetic, but powerless to help.

> "I get actually sick at some of the things I see on the job. I can't do anything though."
>
> After the woman had left, Mabel finished the washing. Then she dressed to go out and took the six dollars she had saved, from her dresser drawer, and went downtown to Bergiotti the bootlegger's place.
>
> When Ken came home from work he found the fire out, the house cold, and no supper. It wasn't Thursday so Mabel wasn't working at the minister's house. He stood looking through the kitchen window at the snow-

> covered back fences, and prayed she hadn't started drinking again. Then he roused himself and went down to the cellar to chop some wood to start a fire in the stove.
>
> Mabel came home two days later.[84]

Cabbagetown ranges here and there throughout the depression era, highlighting first one aspect of the time, and then another. Gabrielle Roy's The Tin Flute concentrates on the effects of poverty on the individual. The novel involves the reader fully in the personal problems of its characters. The lingering effects of the depression form the background against which their lives move, but the human element, throughout the book, is uppermost.

The depression is officially over before the action of The Tin Flute begins, but it is nevertheless still an influential force upon the characters and actions of the people in the story. Azarius is probably the best example of this. Thinking back over his life, in a moment of solitude, he relives the life of a man destroyed by the depression.

> His whole life passed before him, some of the events clear and precise, others blurred, hazy. He saw himself first as a carpenter, building cottages in the suburbs. . . . He could not understand why so many insignificant details were so fresh in his memory, such as the rap of the hammer, the taste of the nails on his lips, the grating sound of a door newly hung as it was opened and closed for the first time, and the flavor of those lunches of long ago.
>
> And then the break came. . . . He was no longer a carpenter, and he saw himself dimly at other jobs for which he was ill suited. He perceived a man who must have been himself yet was not himself. This man was at the wheel of a delivery wagon; he would jump down

> and carry milk bottles from door to door. But it was not long before the man tired of the monotonous routine; he looked for something more interesting. Later he engaged in many different occupations: the milkman became an iceman; the iceman gave way to a store salesman; the salesman disappeared in turn. Then there were only odd jobs, a day's work here and there, at a dollar, thirty cents, even ten cents a day. . . . And then nothing. The man was sitting down near the kitchen stove and stretching himself lazily: "I think they'll give us enough to live on, Mother, while I'm waiting . . . until the building trades recover." 85

His introspection forces him to the realization of what he has become.

> He looked about the wretched room goggle-eyed, as if waking from a bad dream. Rose-Anna has lost faith in me too, he said to himself. She never had faith in me. No one believes in me. He was afraid to wake up completely and see himself as she had seen him for twenty years, as he really was, perhaps.
>
> And all at once he longed to escape from it all. His passion to escape was so intense that his mind teemed with the most absurd plans. He imagined himself making up a bundle and running away before his wife returned. He would hop a freight, he would go to work in the mines. . . He yearned for escape so desperately that he felt as if he were strangling. He wished that he had no wife, no children, no roof over his head. He wanted to be a hobo, lying in the hay under the stars, his face wet with the dew. He longed for the dawn that would find him a free man, without ties, without cares, without love. 86

Azarius may well be demonstrating the mental processes which drove many married men from their homes during the thirties. His problems cannot all be traced back to depression conditions; they stem, perhaps mainly, from weaknesses in his character. It is hard to say what Azarius would have been, if he had escaped the economic pressures of the thirties, but it seems likely that, economically secure, with congenial work to do and Rose-Anna's strength to bolster him, he could have created a satisfactory, if somewhat fanciful, self-image, and maintained his home and family in a suitable manner.

For Rose-Anna, who bears the brunt of the economic problems, the lack of money is an ever-present worry, but secondary in her mind to the many family problems which surround her. She regrets that Florentine must share the financial burdens of her family, but it is Florentine's unhappiness and the problems of her personal life that concern Rose-Anna more. The continual moving from one miserable rented house to another is a painful problem, but less painful than Daniel's illness. Eugene's defection with the vitally important rent money is tragic because of the loss of the money, but more painful because of the manner of its disappearance. It is perhaps more true to say that Rose-Anna suffers from family problems intensified by depression conditions, than to say that she suffers from the depression. Even at the conclusion of the book, when Azarius joins the army and at once wins freedom for himself and economic security for Rose-Anna, Rose-Anna has no freedom. The family burden is now hers alone, Azarius no longer there to provide even the companionship which was her only support.

For Florentine, the depression itself is not a serious problem. She was too young to be among the depression's unemployed, and at the time the story takes place she is employed and relatively independent. She contributes to the family income, but seems to take little or no responsibility for the family welfare otherwise. She longs, from time to time, for clothing and a type of life which is out of her reach, but still manages to afford the occasional small luxury for herself without any pangs of conscience. Florentine is a product of poverty, impoverished spiritually and intellectually by her barren environment, rather than a victim of the depression. Eugene, having escaped the contamination of Saint-Henri by joining the army, turns his back on his family's problems, and achieves the freedom from responsibility Azarius longs for. Weak and selfish, he does not appear to be sufficiently concerned with his family's economic problems to be harmed by them, unless perhaps the very hopelessness of their poverty has led to a subconscious rejection of a responsibility for conditions which appear to him to be in the nature of things, inevitable and beyond repair.

Yet Eugene belongs to those residents of Saint-Henri who were most vitally affected by the depression. These are the men who gather at "The Two Records" to voice their discontent with their situation. It is apparent from the conversations that, though the depression may be over in other parts of the country, it flourishes still in Saint-Henri. A stranger who wanders into the restaurant could be any one of thousands of discontented men of the period.

> "Business is improving," he said, "but mainly in war industries. That's a good line to be in nowadays. If I were beginning over again, that's what I'd do. But I'm a builder by trade, a mason. And d'you know how long it is since I worked at my trade? I'm not speaking of plugging little holes in a wall, jobs that don't pay my expenses. D'you know how long I haven't held a steady job?"
>
> From the depths of a booth, where he sat with his hands flat on the table, he spoke quietly, a pathetic and somehow comical figure with a nervous tic that screwed up the right side of his face.
>
> "Well, I'll tell you. It's eight years since I worked at my own trade. Eight years," he continued in a monotone, without raising his voice. "But I've done many other things. For example I worked as gardener over at the convent, I worked as a paper hanger, and once, during an epidemic, I earned a living as an exterminator, killing bedbugs and cleaning the lice out of mattresses."
>
> Unconscious of the droll effect of his sing-song voice and his wistful air, he babbled on:
>
> "And that's not all. If you want to see a man who's tried everything, look at me. I'm the man for you. After the bed-bug job was finished, I got an idea. A good one. You may laugh, because to look at me you wouldn't think I was the type to go from door to door. All the same I set myself up as a salesman. There's nothing I didn't try to sell: insurance policies — everybody starts with that, you think you're cleverer than you really are — then vanilla flavoring, green tea, Christmas cards, scrubbing brushes, trusses, horse remedies, everything under the sun! . . . There's nothing I haven't tried," he confessed grimly, not addressing anyone in particular, but as if he were searching his own soul. "I've worked at everything except my own trade. They say you have to specialize these days to find work. Well, let me tell you, a trade doesn't mean a thing any more. A man spends half his life learning a trade and the rest of his life forgetting it. No, the good old days in the trades are finished. Today you have to do odd jobs to get by.

There was one escape from Saint-Henri, but it was not open to everyone. Eugene found it, and later Azarius, and even gay little Pitou, who had brightened the sombre lives of his friends with the music of his guitar.

> But as the years passed, Pitou drew sadder and sadder songs from his guitar. If someone asked for a lively tune he sometimes said: "Oh, let me alone!" And then, perched on Ma Philibert's counter, he would suddenly ask: "Is there a single solitary job to be had in this town? Is there a single job to be had?" And you could see his run-down heels and his ragged soles swinging in the air.
>
> Emmanuel walked more slowly as these memories came back to him. He could see as if it were yesterday those thin, worn-out, rain-soaked shoes swinging over his hand at Ma Philibert's, with the two great holes in them growing larger and larger.
>
> Pitou in the army! . . . Pitou was a child, only a child! Yesterday he was playing with his harmonica or his guitar; today he was carrying a bayonet. And then Emmanuel thought with horror that Pitou need mourn no longer because he was unemployed. Pitou was earning his living now -- he lived like a bird anyway and asked for so little -- Pitou could be happy, and it was not surprising that he clicked his heels so smartly. Pitou was happy because he held in his hands his first working tools.[88]

It is only an escape into possible death, but infinitely preferable to the fate of Alphonse, for whom there is no escape. With Pitou he is caught up temporarily in the excitement of the martial music, the waving flags and the marching men.

> "Dammit!" I said to myself, "dammit, Alphonse, it's been a long time since you've seen men so well dressed and so well fed. Fall in line," I said to myself. "Fall in line!"

Joining the line of marching men, he feels a comradeship with those beside him. "There's a future in the army, eh bud?" says the man beside him.

> "There I was marching along between the two of them, the kid of eighteen and the old man with the stooped back, and I too could see the future."

The vision begins to fade when they reach the barracks, and the inevitable paper work of the enlistment. The general knowledge examination is disastrous, but he comes out of it still hopeful.

> "After that, they made me strip and took me to the doctor. 'Open your mouth,' he said to me. 'By jingo I never saw so many rotten teeth in all my life. I can tell you've never gone to see a dentist!' After that another one bawled me out because instead of buying eye-glasses when I was ten years old I bought my-self an all-day sucker. The funniest guy of the lot was the one who gave me hell because I'd been brought up on canned beans instead of good pasteurized milk. But you know, I refused to give up. There's a future in the army, I told myself. As long as the kid and the old man and all the newspapers in town said so, it must be so. They'll give me a going-over, and I'll be all set for the future they're talking about."
>
> There was a silence then, broken by the ringing of the railroad signal bell. A deep rumble filled the street. Under the heavy tread of the locomotive the earth shook.
>
> "Didn't they accept you?" asked Emmanuel, unable to bear the suspense any longer.
>
> Alphonse broke into a wild fit of laughter, shaking like a tree in a storm.
>
> "You're always in such a hurry," he said . . . "But wait a minute, because what I'm going to tell you now is the funniest of all. They patched up the old chap [who was accepted though Alphonse was rejected] like new; they made another man of him, gave him glasses, pulled out his tonsils, vaccinated him from head to foot, stuffed him full of vitamins; they even straightened out his nose, which was a bit lopsided. He certainly will make a fine-looking corpse, with his false teeth and his

> straight nose. As for the kid, they did a quick job on him! He had all his teeth, all his hair, all his limbs, and all his gay spirits into the bargain . . ."

But there was no future in the army for Alphonse.

> Emmanuel's eyes followed him until he was out of sight. Alphonse seemed more dead to him than all the future dead of the battlefields. And he went on his way, disconsolate, repeating to himself as in a dream a thought that had begun to be an obsession, a refrain he could not drive out of his mind: "The peace was as bad as the war. The peace killed as many men as the war. The peace is as bad . . . as bad . . ." 89

Emmanuel too escapes from Saint-Henri and goes off to war.

Boarding the train for departure he looks around him.

> Behind him shone the face of Pitou. And behind there were other faces with the same look of exaltation. Emmanuel felt as if he were dreaming. Were these the unemployed of yesterday? Were these the fellows he had known when they were forlorn and browbeaten, down in the mouth?

Shaken, he asks himself, "Why are we all going to War?"

and then puts the question to Florentine.

> "Why do you suppose we are going off to war, your father, your brother and I?" he asked.
>
> She looked at him in surprise.
>
> "You mean why did you enlist?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Well, I can see only one reason," she said soberly. "It's because there's something in it for all of you in the army."
>
> He studied her for a long time. Yes, he should have thought of that sooner. She was much closer to the people than he; she knew them better. Her answers were the right ones. He looked around at the crowd. And he seemed to hear the same answer that Florentine had just given him on thousands of lips. Behind the crowd's deep breath of liberation he thought he could hear the sound of money clinking.

> They, too, he mused. They too have been bought, as much as anybody, more than anybody!
>
> And it seemed to him that with his own eyes he was witnessing the final bankruptcy of humanity. 90

Florentine, too, has been bought.

> We're going to live well at last, she kept repeating to herself. Papa did the right thing, he did the right thing to enlist. It's the finest thing he ever did in his life. And Mamma, oh well, Mamma has to be miserable about something. I wonder why she takes it so hard. She never had so much money before!
>
> She walked rapidly, calculating the sum of their combined incomes. And she was delighted to see how well everything had worked out. To plan their life in a sensible way required some presence of mind, and the responsibility was quite new to her. Their troubles were over, they were far away now. Yes, a new life was beginning for them all.
>
> And yet at times she felt a pang as she thought of all the money that would be given to them, the women, while their men risked their lives. But not relishing such thoughts, she returned to her calculations. Good gracious, she was rich! There were so many things she could buy for her mother and the children as well as for herself. At heart she rejoiced at the course of events, for without the war where would they all be? 91

Florentine, like Alphonse, is a casualty of her environment, crippled emotionally and spiritually by malnutrition. There is the same irony in both their lives. Alphonse is foiled, in his attempt to escape from his environment, by the effects of that environment on his body; Florentine's escape is made possible by the stultifying effect of that environment on her soul. Rose-Anna, growing up spiritually healthy among the sugar maples of her childhood, found no release.

In a very real sense, then, we may consider The Tin Flute depression literature, for its main theme is poverty -- the grinding poverty which settled in Saint-Henri during the depression and remained, entrenched, until, for at least some of its victims, the war brought escape.

Like Garner's Cabbagetown, Dorothy Livesay's "In Green Solariums" takes the whole of the depression as a theme, touching all aspects of depression life. The experiences of the girl in the poem are reminiscent of those of Myrla Patson. Like Myrla, she is seduced by a member of the family for which she works, and is turned out to fend for herself.

> I worked in a store for a dollar a day, and lived
> In an upper room down near the waterfront.
> Snow came again. Men would be out there tramping,
> Looking for work. And I knew they'd go
> Daily, up to the streets where I had lived.
> I'd see them brushing shoulders with a boss,
> A sleek, well-fitting business man who wore
> A fur coat or a cheerful woolly scarf —
> I'd see them begging for a cup of tea,
> I'd see them in a crowded sandwich shop
> Having maybe a cup of coffee to sip;
> And if a man were dirty and unkempt
> The management would give instructions: so,
> A waitress would be forced to kick him out
> Or call the dicks if he demurred at all.
>
> He did not. Nothing else for him to do
> But slump and starve and then be hurried off
> To jail again — the same charge, "vagrancy."

I was so mad I clenched my fists, grew hot
Ready to fling myself and kick the cop.
The man beside me saw, and seized my arm.
"Say, kid! No use. Sit still." I looked
at him,
Scornful at what I thought his "cowardice."
But he wasn't a coward. He wasn't quiet
at all
But he said, "sit still," and taught me the
hard fact
That one lone rebel does no good at all.
"You've got to know what you're fighting
against, and then
You've got to show others the way. Together
you'll swing
Out onto the road. That's solidarity."[92]

The same breadth of vision is in her "Dominion Day at Regina," which emphasizes not the local aspects of the riot, but the wider areas of experience from which the original protest has arisen.

We, from the prairies' sweep
reared with the wheatfields
who followed the gopher
home to his mating

Kin to the pine tree
tossed with sea foam
in rusty rock's heart
blasting a home

We from a mining town
seared with black dust
suckled on bosses' oath
schooled by our struggles

Give us no uniforms --
warm walls instead;
pierce with no bayonets
we ask for bread!

We offer our hands
our sinew and bone --
Give us the work
and it shall be done![93]

The depression literature of the industrial areas has little or no comment on the influx of would-be laborers from the west who swelled the ranks of the Montreal unemployed. Social injustice, unemployment and poverty, and the resulting radical political thinking -- these are the substance of the depression in the east. If a proportion of the men who crowd St. Catherine Street are refugees from prairie drought, George and Heather and Paul and the residents of Saint-Henri are unaware. For them the depression is a blunder for which man alone must answer; there is no suggestion that it is, also, an act of God.

CHAPTER III

DEPRESSION LITERATURE
of the
CANADIAN PRAIRIES

I

Thus we find in the depression literature of industrial Canada the same themes which we found in the depression literature of the United States and Britain, varied in form and emphasis, but still clearly discernible. Basic to them is economic depression, resulting in a variety of social and psychological problems.

We might expect to find the same themes, altered to fit the changes in circumstances, in the literature of the Canadian prairies, for the economic conditions were no better here than elsewhere. We do, in fact, find these themes, but dwarfed and altered almost beyond recognition, just as the economic depression itself was dwarfed in significance for prairie dwellers by a second calamity which struck the area simultaneously: the drought. It is the drought with its attendant problems which dominates the literature of the prairies. The familiar themes, though still discernible, have become minor.

The problems which occupied the minds of prairie dwellers during the period are reflected in a body of material which found publication either privately by the authors, or in the newspapers and periodicals. Most of this is of greater value from the sociological than the literary point of view, but a brief consideration of it may be useful as background for the more serious literature. Its particular value lies in its immediacy; it was, in general, the product of the moment. It reflects, therefore, the thoughts that were uppermost in the minds of the writers. The familiar depression themes provide its material, the emphasis depending upon the particular circumstances of the individual writer.

Depression poverty, like the poverty and hardship of the pioneer period, is a recurring subject for the doggerel and homespun verse produced by prairie dwellers. The dry farmer's son in the "Song of 1934" from Robert Wylie Rodgers' Dry Belt Jingles cries plaintively,

> I never can dress like the boys in the towns,
> I'm always wearing "hand-me-downs."
> My trousers will soon need another patch,
> And probably then the colors don't match.
> Boo Hoo, Boo Hoo, I never get anything new. . . .
>
> I asked my Dad the other day,
> If it rains this year and there's lots of hay,
> Oh how will then the chances be
> To get a new pair of pants for me. . . .
> He shook his head in a puzzled way.
> I'm afraid there are too many debts to pay.[1]

The problem of unemployment, always there in the background of depression literature, is not extensively treated anywhere in the imaginative literature of the prairies, a logical result of the fact that the prairie unemployed tended to go elsewhere in search of work. The activities of the single unemployed on the prairies are well covered by the prairie newspapers, once their unrest begins to produce newsworthy events, but the literary comment appears only occasionally in their magazine sections, as in this poem by Edna Jaques in the Calgary Herald:

UNEMPLOYED

Ah, Life, it isn't much to ask
The right to earn my daily bread,
I'd work my fingers to the bone
To see my children clothed and fed.
(The little one who came last year
Is frail and small . . . . and oh so dear).
Ah World, in all your length and breadth,
Is there no niche for me to fill --
No glad sweet labor for my hands
No field to plow . . . . no land to till?
(The empty hours yawn ahead
With every dawn a day to dread.)
Must we go shabby and forlorn
(I don't mind for myself at all,)
The girls are getting older now;
Mary is growing slim and tall,
Wants pretty clothes as all girls should,
She always was so dear and good.
To be denied the right to toil
Is breeding bitterness and hate.
God grant the tides of destiny
Swing not too far, or stay too late.
For work is health and strength and meat.[2]
To idle hands is labor sweet.

Mrs. Jaques experienced much of the depression on a farm in southern Saskatchewan. As poetry her work may lack depth, but the warmth with which it was received during the thirties indicated, no doubt, that she spoke for more than herself. Although her poems are sentimental and trite, they are sincere, and they struck a responsive chord in a generation of women who shared her farm experiences, and who gave each other autographed copies of her collections of poems and treasured them because they found something of themselves between the covers of a book.

Typical of her work is this expression of simple faith:

A FARMER'S WIFE
(In the drought area)

The crop has failed again, the wind and sun
Dried out the stubble first, then one by one
The strips of summerfallow, seered [sic] with heat,
Crunched, like old fallen leaves, our lovely wheat.
The garden is a dreary, blighted waste,
The very air is gritty to my taste.

And now I ask, O Lord, a mother's prayer!
Help me to know these fields so brown and bare
Are not of Thee, that all this stricken land
Is not because of Thine avenging hand,
But ours the fault; we did not farm it right
And now it answers us with wind and blight.

I don't know how we'll face another year --
Help us someway to know that you are near.
The children need so many things, and I --
I don't mind much, but oh, I'd love to buy
A nice dress, a soft blue silk that clings.
O God, forgive me for such trivial things!

I know we'll manage somehow, but today
It is all dark, I cannot see the way;
The months loom up with all their snow and cold.
Oh, give us something, Lord, some faith to hold,
Something that we can count on, look ahead
Above these stricken fields so brown and dead.

And even as I wait before Thy throne
New strength flows in, and I am not alone;
This hour with Thee has brought me strength and grace.
I shall go on with courage now to face
Whatever comes, the children will be fed:
Give us each day, Oh God, our daily bread![3]

The morale of the prairie farmer during the thirties needed all the support it could get. Faith as a morale-building element appears again in Edna Jaques' poem, "The New Year."

A "New Year" trailing its clouds of light,
As the Old Year went with his measured tread,
The World was all still, then someone said:
"Good-bye Old Year. You have used us well,"
But he only smiled and waved farewell.

Now wouldn't you think with a brand new start,
That we'd try again with a cheerful heart,
And give the "New Year" a helping hand
And buckle down with a twisted grin
To dig us out from the rut we're in.

For it isn't treaties we're needing now,
But every man with his hand to the plow,
And every woman and child on earth
Just doing their best for all they're worth.
For every cross, there's a shining crown,
And no man's whipped, 'till he says he's down.

And now for the good that the Year will bring,
Melted snow, and the feel of spring,
Homes where Love is a welcome guest
And life is so good — if we choose the best —
Laughter and cheer and a bit of song
And FAITH IN OURSELVES to keep us strong.[4]

Such homely philosophies provided the bulk of the material for the magazine sections which flourished during the thirties in the prairie newspapers. One of the most singular of these was the Leader-Post's offshoot, The Torchbearer's Magazine. Founded as "The Torchbearer's Page" in 1923, it grew in popularity until by 1936 the Torchbearer's Club had an international membership of 7,741 young people, ranging in age from 10 to 20 years, including members from Canada, United States, Australia, South Africa and the British Isles.[5] It was essentially a children's literary magazine, with a membership predominantly from the Canadian prairies, and its vigorous activity during the depression was in all probability at least partly due to the fact that it offered an inexpensive — almost free — source of entertainment to young people who had little or no money to spend, and a great deal of enforced leisure.

The Torchbearers make little reference to economic hardships. The occasional letter indicates dreams or desires postponed or thwarted by lack of money, but this by way of information rather than complaint. The romantic optimism which is to be expected of healthy young minds; the profound philosophical essays based on little knowledge or experience but full of conviction; the impossibly romantic short stories, with hopelessly contrived plots; the awkwardly worded verse on trite themes -- these are the things to be expected of very young writers. There is no indication that the minds and characters and daily lives of these young people have been adversely affected by their environment. Where mention of the environment does creep in it is the drought, and not the depression, which is the subject, as in this poem by Marion McLeod of Gull Lake, appearing in the issue of July 18, 1936.

PRAIRIE PICTURE
Westerner's Prayer

We do not ask for mensions grand
Nor fortunes [sic] wealth and ease;
Our simple western wishes are
More easily filled than these.
We little care for richest clothes --
Vacations come too soon,
Oh no, we ask no luxuries
But pray for rain in June.

The rancher's cattle roam the range
Gaunt -- hungry -- slaked with thirst
-- Dry waterholes -- burnt withered grass,
Their suffering is the worst.
The farmer's wheat is brown and sere,
-- Heads will be filling soon;
Must they be stunted, dwarfed and poor,
For lack of rain in June?

The gardens, flowers, and e'en the trees
Are calling for a drink
Some clouds are gathering overhead,
It must rain soon, we think.
Great foreman of the western plain,
You'll save us from all ruin;
Oh hear Thy simple children's prayer,
And send us rain in June.

Apparently the rain came, for the next issue carried a sequel from the same hand, titled "Westerner's Prayer Answered."

Edna Jaques, turning to prose for a moment in a MacLean's article written when the drought was at its worst, introduces a theme which becomes major in the serious literature -- the problem of whether the prairie farmer should abandon his farm. She expresses the faith of the farmer who, even as he watches the apparent destruction of his farm, believes in the future of the country.

> And now it is over, and the drought has come, and grasshoppers and Russian thistle. The brave shining countryside is a barren place; no piles of threshed wheat now, only bare wind-scoured fields and buried fence posts.
>
> But the people are holding on. Steadfast and unwhipped. Once, during a terrific sandstorm, my brother said: "Blow, darn you, blow! But you won't blow me off this farm -- it's mine! And you can blow everything off but the mortgage, but I'll still be here."
>
> And they will, most of them. They'll stick until the tide turns. It cost them too much for them to leave it easily. Too many hundred hours of backbreaking toil went into its making, for them to quit now. Too many years of life, the strong working years, when it was good just to be alive, and good to feel the sun against your face and the warm pulsing soil beneath your feet,

> when the children were little and golden years ahead.
>
> And so they won't quit. A hundred years from now their children's children's children will still be striking out new lands and harvesting wheat. And Briercrest will still be there, with its ragged sky-line of elevators and huddled houses and the grey spire of the church will point heavenward and nothing will be forgotten.
>
> Because, somehow, it is the soul of the prairie, vast and comfortless, holding in its lonely graveyard the bones of her pioneers, and in her warm soil the blood and sinew of new wheat.[6]

The basis of this prediction seems to be more emotional than intellectual, but the faith it expresses appears to be justified, at least in part, by the events of the last forty years. Briercrest may perhaps not be considered by everyone to embody the soul of the prairie, and new lands in the vicinity are even now difficult to find, but Briercrest is still there, and Briercrest farmers are, indeed, still harvesting significant quantities of wheat.

Some prairie farmers, lacking the Jaques confidence in the future of the prairie farm, would have left if there had been a viable alternative. Like "The Fed Up Dry Farmer" in Rodgers' Dry Belt Jingles they stayed on the farm simply because they had no better place to go.

> Oh how I hate this country
>   And everything that's in it!
> I wouldn't stay here, not at all,
>   Not for a single minute.
> If I could sell out and get away
>   You couldn't see me for dust.
> The only reason I'm sticking around
>   Is just because I must.

But if I left this country
    Where had I better go?
North? Too many mosquitoes,
    And I do hate them so.
Irrigation? Not for me.
    They have skeeters down there too,
And you are frogging around in rubber boots
    In the water and the dew.

I can't go back to that place in the States --
    The place where I used to belong.
The immigration laws are strict.
    The arm of the law is strong.
I'm not blaming them for that.
    It doesn't make me sore.
But I can't go back to that place to live.
    They don't want me any more.

And if I went to the city
    I'd be a whistle slave.
I would make quite a lot of money
    But very little I'd save.
A house that was fit to live in
    Would be very hard to find,
And there would be dust and gasolene fumes
    And sickness of every kind.

Maybe the little old dry farm
    Is the best place after all
I'll try it another year.
    Perhaps more rain will fall.

Sometimes, where the farmer's morale failed and escape seemed impossible, madness or suicide resulted. The crazy homesteader in Rodgers' "The Song of 1937" may have had problems not related to depression conditions, but the timing suggests otherwise:

Oh he's just as crazy, crazy, crazy,
Crazy as a loon.
We'll have to take him away to Ponok,
And we'll have to take him soon.
He talks to himself the whole day long,
And he eats his spuds with a spoon.
We'll have to take him away to Ponok,
And we'll have to take him soon.

The suicide appears in a play by M. Evans Bicknell, called Relief, which was produced at a provincial drama festival in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, in 1936.[7] The problem of the father here is more complicated. Driven to poverty by the drought and the depression, he resents the money that has been spent, through the influence of his wife, on the education of his children. A son has become a doctor in British Columbia, a daughter a singer with the National Broadcasting Company. Both have apparently forgotten their parents, who provided the money for their education at great sacrifice to themselves. A younger son, still at home, plans to go north to homestead. Abandoned by his children, and embittered by their ingratitude, the father retires to the barn and shoots himself. The shot, offstage, cuts into a scene in the house where the mother is reading a telegram from the two prosperous children which outlines plans for reuniting the whole family in the Utopian (watered) land of British Columbia.

A *Maclean's* article, "The Trek to Meadow Lake," by W. J. Mather, published in the spring of 1932,[8] is an interesting discussion of the experiences of those who abandoned their farms to travel north early in the depression. The trek was, he says,

> the greatest internal migration Canada has seen . . . Before winter set in some 10,000 persons had moved from the prairies to find new homes in the Northern bush. Compared to such a migration, the movement of the historic Barr Colony of 1200 persons to the country around Lloydminster was small. It meant the opening of the province and a large area in the northwest of the province and a large area in the northeast. But it would be untrue to the facts to represent it as in the main an adventure in pioneering of

> spirited youth. It was to a greater extent a pilgrimage of the middle-aged, beaten once but trying again.

He goes on to describe the manner of the trek.

> Number Four Highway of the Province of Saskatchewan was the main channel of the northward stream. Each family group made up a caravan. First came the hayrack, roofed in with canvas, the moving home of the family. Fastened with wire or rope to the sides and ends of the rack were chairs, tables, bedsprings and ends, stable lantern, hay forks and other impedimenta of the farm. The man of the family was driving, and children often peered out from under the canvas hood. Tied behind came the family cow trudging along unprotestingly.
>
> Next came the farm wagon with the high grain box, driven by the wife or a boy or a girl, the visible contents a dismantled mower, boxes and bundles of household goods, and if the owner was lucky, a bag or two of oats. Trailing behind the wagon rattled the buggy in which the children used to drive to school, now surmounted by a crate of hens.

Mather's account of the experiences of the migrants ends with an optimistic glance backward.

> And the country they have left -- is it down and out? Not if history repeats itself. This is not the first Northward trek in times of drought. In the early eighties of the last century the country around Estevan was deserted by farmers who went north to the Swan River bush country west[9] of Yorkton. The prairie comes back.

His confidence was shared by the agricultural journalists of the period. Many of the agricultural articles appear to be written for the purpose of educating the easterner, ignorant of western conditions and prone to offer impractical suggestions and believe mistaken theories. They are comprehensive discussions, by men who are well informed, and they are all tinged with the inevitable emotional involvement that results from watching a valiant human battle against great odds.[10]

One of the most objective, in spite of the romantic turn of phrase to which the author is given, is Terry Rowe's discussion in The Canadian Magazine for April, 1937. It is entitled "Are the Prairies Doomed?" and gives rise to an editorial in the same issue which points out that the answer to this question vitally concerns all Canadians and not just the prairie dwellers.

The article, well illustrated with the characteristic pictures of farmsteads buried in dust, farm caravans headed north, and herds of cattle "en route as a 'rescue' measure, to either abattoirs or greener pastures," provides quantities of statistics which, as statistics usually do, outline the magnitude of the tragedy rather than its quality. "More than 50,000 persons have abandoned homes in Canada's prairie west since 1929." "Saskatchewan . . . has approximately 290,000 persons either in need or already receiving government assistance, exactly 31 per cent of the province's population." "An average of 116,580 each month have been forced to receive government assistance. Fifty thousand more are preparing to desert!" The article goes on to ask what the future possibilities are for the "bread basket of the world," and quotes in answer the varied opinions of agricultural authorities. It includes a report on the activities of technical experts backed by the government:

> In five years -- by 1939 -- rehabilitation experts expect the prairies will have been well enough fortified to withstand the rigors of the most severe drought period likely to harass western wheat farmers. That such drought will recur, they are certain. That the present one will not get beyond their control, they are confident.

The concluding note is less optimistic. Rowe places side by side the dogged persistence of those farmers who have refused to leave their land and the broken morale of those who have deserted. He quotes the experts who say that the area is doomed to become a desert, and the knowledgeable agriculturists who see the phenomenon of drought as a cyclical problem which can and will be overcome by technical means. He gathers together the evidence, and leaves the decision to the reader.

It is apparent, from his treatment of his subject, that the author -- on the staff of the Regina Daily Star -- is a journalist rather than an agricultural expert. H. G. L. Strange and Wilfred Eggleston treat the same subject, but they are agriculturists as well as journalists. The statistics are there -- substantially the same statistics -- but used to support informed opinion as to what has gone wrong in the west, and what should be done to remedy it. Egglestone produces, one by one, the remedies which have been suggested by those whose knowledge of conditions is not profound, and explains why they are impractical. Abandoning these fanciful schemes he relies, instead, on the results of work being done at experimental stations advocating shelter belts of trees and shrubs, development of new varieties of plants suitable for arid areas, construction of dams and dug-outs, the building up of feed and seed and cash reserves in good years, irrigation where practical and the encouragement of sounder methods of farm finance and farm management, and finally selective abandonment on a small scale to remove unproductive farm land and farmers from the agricultural picture.

> Ottawa, you see, is satisfied that good years are coming. It has not given up the whole drought-stricken prairie as a bad job. If long-time weather records mean anything, they promise before long a cycle of heavier rainfall and snowfall.

Then, says Eggleston , western agriculture will begin a new cycle and will have an opportunity to profit from past mistakes, and face the next period of drought well prepared.[11]

Strange advances a similar opinion, in his discussion of the agricultural industry, but he draws a distinction which the other writers do not make:

> The prairie soil is dried of moisture, but is not 'out' and will not be, for the soil will survive.
>
> The prairie farmer is dried of resources, but is not yet 'out' either. He will strive as long as he can survive . . . but can the farmer of the drought area of the west survive? That, indeed, is the question; the real and only important problem. It always has been the only major important problem in connection with any condition of drought anywhere in the world.
>
> The people -- not the land. The land always survives. Land does not die. The rain, when it comes, always recuperates the soil and enables it again to produce fine crops.
>
> But the people![12]

Of the actual scientific work which went into the reclamation of the land in southeastern Saskatchewan, and the irrigation projects of southeastern Alberta, there is little mention in the imaginative literature. Strip farming, advocated by the agricultural scientists as a deterrent to soil drifting, is referred to obliquely in Edna Jaques' poem "A Farmer's Wife" quoted previously, when she mentions the "strips of summerfallow."

By far the greater bulk of the journalistic writing develops a political theme. Its purpose is entirely practical, and its authors are either political propagandists or commentators, writing to influence the thinking of the public. Elsewhere the appearance of the political theme in prairie literature in no way reflects the fever of political activity which gave rise to the C.C.F. and the Social Credit parties during the thirties. As the depression made its presence uncomfortably felt across Canada, the search for a scapegoat began. The obvious victim was the Liberal party under Mackenzie King, which had been in power since 1921. Their record was not one to inspire confidence in the economically distressed.

> The Depression was well into its third and in some places its fourth year before anything like systematic relief became general. In relatively rich Toronto a family of seven was entitled to food vouchers worth just under seven dollars a week. In Saskatchewan a family of five could expect ten dollars a month plus a ninety-eight-pound sack of flour. They were forbidden to squander any of the money on fruit or any vegetable except potatoes and dried beans. Most relief rations, as the rebellious Manitoba judge Lewis St. Stubbs once snapped, were not enough to live on and not enough to die on. . . . Mackenzie

> King . . . handled the depression exactly as though it were another parliamentary opponent. His strategy seemed to be to wait it out, watch for it to make a mistake, then pounce on it.[13]

His failure to take effective action against the depression was only one of the considerations which contributed to King's defeat in the 1931 election, but it was a significant one. The Conservatives were loud in their denunciations. During the election campaign, "Bennett had been an avenging angel demanding the head of a government that had neglected the national crisis of unemployment." Once safely in office, however, he became "the voice of calm and sobriety asking: What crisis?"[14] It is not surprising that many of the discontented victims of the depression repudiated both old line parties, and looked for new political leaders and new policies to guide them back to prosperity.

The left-wing socialists found the situation ready-made for them, and there was a resulting surge of activity among leftist groups. The more radical elements with Communistic affiliations were forced underground by legislation, but found considerable support among the intellectuals as well as the working classes. Their political literature is of no interest for this thesis. More important for our purpose are the two new parties which emerged in Western Canada: the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan, and the Social Credit party in Alberta. Superficially they had much in common. Both the new leaders had strong religious affiliations.

Both parties proposed radical departures from the established economic patterns; both championed the cause of the ordinary citizen; both charged the old-line parties with complacency, with a lack of concern for the suffering of the working classes, and a bias in favor of the established privilege of big business. While neither posed an immediate threat to the old-line parties at the federal level, both gained rapid popularity provincially, drawing support from Liberal and Conservative defectors and from the Progressives and the discredited United Farmers of Alberta, both of which disappeared from the political scene. The C.C.F. proposed to reorganize the economic system without disrupting its basic structure. It represented a type of socialism the country had been aware of before. But Social Credit was a new phenomenon, advocating unorthodox changes which were greeted outside the province, and by some observers inside as well, with incredulity and dismay. It was not only the policies of the party which were viewed with alarm. Its rise was deplored for philosophical as well as economic reasons, and by people who had no political or economic axe to grind. The C.C.F. was founded by a former missionary and Methodist preacher, but he made no attempt to use his religion for political purposes. Social Credit was born out of a revival meeting; as it grew it clung to its religious origins. It struck the ear of the radio audiences in Alberta with the emotional impact of an evangelical crusade. Aberhart was at once a political and a religious leader, and the two roles, as he played them, were not only indistinguishable but they were well designed for the Alberta farmers, as G. B. Ferguson points out in an article published in the April 1935 issue of the Canadian Forum.

The prairie farmer, he says, has endured the ordeals of both drought and economic depression, and

> he is discouraged, down-hearted and broke. He owes everybody more money than he thinks he will ever see again, and because he is a decent fellow, it worries him.
>
> Then he tunes in on his radio, and he hears a voice explaining with unbounded confidence that his troubles can all be simply solved by a little juggling of currency and credit. Jehovah speaking from Sinai could not have spoken with more assurance, and the children of Israel were never so discouraged as the Alberta farmers are to-day. The Israelites had manna. The Albertans have no manna -- not yet. But Mr. Aberhart has promised them money, cash money in amounts they have almost forgotten. Real, honest-to-God cash in hand, $25 a month. This is the real thing, and who will blame them if they don't tumble over themselves to get on the Social Credit bandwagon.[15]

Ferguson seriously underestimates Aberhart politically, assuming that his chances of being elected are slight, but nevertheless deplores his activities as dangerous to the emotional and spiritual well-being of his followers.

Concern for the results of widespread disillusionment with Aberhart is expressed, also, by J. J. Zubick, editor and publisher of a singular political publication The Rebel, produced in Calgary. Zubick quotes a letter from a reader-correspondent who says that if she thought that Aberhart "could be as you describe that poor man, I should lose all faith in mankind in general and life would be finished for me."[16] He reports another instance of a woman who "had to be forcibly restrained from throwing herself from a window high up in a Calgary office building when her faith in Aberhart was brought into question." Zubick thereupon proceeds to devote the twelve projected issues of his paper to exposing Aberhart, "to hasten his downfall and at the same time to ease the shock of disillusionment." He minces no words in his condemnation of Aberhart, even while insisting that his attack is against Aberhartism (which he carefully distinguishes from Social Credit)[17] rather than against Aberhart.[18] This statement is difficult to reconcile with his estimate of Aberhart as a "dishonest, dishonorable, lying, blaspheming charlatan, who insinuated himself into power by deception and misrepresentation, and is morally unfit to hold the office of premier."[19]

The most entertaining features in the publication are the occasional parodies which appear, sometimes signed, sometimes anonymously. The following from the sixth issue (July 30, 1937), bears only the acknowledgement that it is contributed. It has no title, but is headed by a cartoon of Aberhart complete with bald head, double chin, halo and top hat.

> I am a perfect pattern of a pious
> prophet-premier.
> I'm popular with victims of intellectual
> anemia,
> I've solved the pressing problems of the
> common commissariat;
> And how to pinch and plunder the Provincial
> proletariat.

I'm clad in purple vesture and I draw a
princely salary;
I'm unsurpassed in all the arts of playing
to the gallery;
I clutch the spoils of office with unparalleled
tenacity;
And don't propose to lose my job through ill-
advised veracity.

It continues through several stanzas satirizing Aberhart's fundamentalist preachings and his "political insanity," to the concluding stanzas:

Salvation may be free; but I require from
my supporters
A constantly-increasing stream of nothing less
than quarters;
And while I preach on usurers and how to
circumvent 'em,
I insist upon my pound of flesh down to the
last percentum.

I know the inwardness of scrip, the secret
of prosperity;
And when I call for covenants they sign 'em
with celerity;
For I alone am competent to mould the modern
mania;
And build the ultra-perfect state of fountain-
pensylvania.

The final issue carries a contribution from F. G. Rose of Edmonton, titled "The Mischancellor of Gunnysaxony."

Of Gunnysaxony I'm the Chief.
I long to lessen MY PEOPLE'S grief.
While I'm in broadcloth, milk and spats,
THEY'RE living on gophers and mice and rats!
MY PEOPLE are innocent, trustful fools;
My Council are supple, subservient tools.
To picture their crawling in adequate terms,
They might well be described as the Diet of Worms!
(CHORUS) A clearly congenial company for
An arrogant, artful Mischancellor!

He goes on to comment on the political activities of the Mischancellor:

I use my office for useful ends.
I take good care to flatter my friends.

And here I sit from day to day,
Giving agreeable jobs away. . . .

I favor none but the pure and good;
And I've made it quite thoroughly understood
That insurrection against my Throne,
If it wreck my fortunes, will ruin their own!
So I've cancelled contracts, and cooked up codes,
And worshipped that wondrous Colossus of Roads;
And slaughtered the sheep, and protected the goats,
For the laudable purpose of purchasing Votes!
(CHORUS) A painful, precarious predicament for
Such a very high-minded Mischancellor . . . !

The attack on Aberhart was already well under way when The Rebel entered the arena, and continued without abatement after its demise.[20] Zubick himself pays tribute to the newspapers in general, and especially the weekly press, which have "remained uninfected by the poisonous virus of Aberhartism."[21] One such weekly, The Flare, published in Black Diamond, Alberta, included a piece of light verse attacking the Social Credit phenomenon or its leader, as a weekly feature. These were later collected into a booklet entitled Pulpit Pounding Bill and Other Rhymes of Aberhartia, written by Barney Halpin, published by The Flare, and dedicated

> To the Weekly Newspapers of Alberta, who in spite of boycotts and a threatened domination by the Social Credit Government, have continued to publish their convictions. . . . May the weekly press of Alberta continue to maintain the right of freedom of expression as part of the eternal vigilance -- the price of freedom.

In theme they are identical with The Rebel, and subtlety is not their strong point, but the best of them are amusing parodies.

ALBERTA'S BOY BLUE

The folks in Alberta are losing their trust,
But still on the Platform he stands,
The plans he has made are beginning to rust,
While distress is still great in the land.

Time was, when the Aberhart plan was new
And Douglas was spouting air,
And that was the time, the people came through,
Voted and placed him there.

I know you are slow, and are dumb, he said,
And fall for a lot of noise;
So put in a government with me at the head,
Then play with your pretty toys.

And as they were playing, the years went on,
And dividends never came through.
But the plans were many, the sermons were long,
But old Abie's words weren't true.

Yes, faithless to everyone's trust he stands,
Still in the same old place.
Bewailing the poverty still in the land,
And still shooting off his face.

But we wonder, as waiting these long years through,
When he will be given the air,
And what will become of those pledges in blue,
That were signed to keep him there.

"An Alberta A.B.C." is characteristically blunt[22] working its way methodically through the alphabet from "A's for Alberta;/ It's also for Abe" to "Z's for what Aberhart's done, which is zero." Lewis Carroll's famous verse lends itself aptly to parody:

"You are old, Father William!" young Manning said,
"And your policy doesn't seem wise:
Your success in Alberta has gone to your head,
And you have taken to making up lies."

"I haven't, I haven't," old William replied,
"But the press always jumps on my back,
They say that the interview to them denied,
Will help put me up on the rack."

"You are old, Father William," young Manning said,
"And your tongue always gives you away;
You slide too far backwards in getting ahead,
And you always have too much to say. . . ."

Probably the most successful in the collection, however, is the following, which is quoted in full, including the Author's Note:

ABERWOCKY

'Twas Sundig, and the Abertroves
Did roar and rumble on the rade;
All windy were the Socredoves,
And the editaths upbrade.

"Beware the Bankerwock, my son!
The notes they hold, the claws that grasp,
Beware the printprint bird, and shun
The infamous Liberasp."

They took his vorpel words to heart;
Long time the dreadsome foe they sought.
So rested they by the Rumrum tree,
And stood a while in thought.

And as in goofish thought they stood,
The Bankerwock with pen in hand,
Came whistling through the pulgey wood
And wurgled through the sand.

Not true! Not true! and you and you
His vorpol words went snickersnack:
They thought it dead, but they instead
Were chased galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Bankerwock?
Come to my arms, my faithful few!
Oh, sadious day! You've not you say,"
He blubbered and turned blue.

'Twas sundig, and the Abertroves
Did roar and rumble on the rade:
All windy were the Socredoves,
And the editaths upbrade.

Author's Note -- This, while a very poor attempt at writing a parody on Lewis Carroll's most famous Nonsense Poem, "Jaberwocky," is, we believe more sensible than the Social Credit Theory.

Perhaps it was Barney Halpin's efforts which inspired the Social Crediters to use Lewis Carroll's works for their own purposes. Alice in Blunderland, published by the Social

Credit Board, proclaims itself to be a "humorous sketch in one act" and No. 2 of the "Educational Series." The detractors of the Social Credit movement might say, with some justice, that its main claim to humor lay in the fact that it considered itself educational. It displays little literary talent and less wit, being undisguised political propaganda masquerading as drama. There are two characters, Alice and the Mad Hatter, and the scene is laid in Blunderland as the title suggests. Any country which does not subscribe to the Social Credit theories -- in other words, all the world except Alberta -- is Blunderland, and to Alice, visiting this queer country from the enlightened heights of a Social Credit oriented land, the absurdities of the old systems are obvious and she is astonished that anyone could accept them. To her, Blunderland seems "an awfully queer place." Invited to explain to the Mad Hatter "What's so queer about our country," she answers,

> "Well, to begin with, everything seems upside down, and nothing makes sense. Besides if you will forgive my saying so, you all seem a little mad."

To which the Mad Hatter replies,

> "It may be crazy but we like it that way -- besides, it pays -- some of us. And as for making sense -- it's not supposed to. Sense is common and we are very select."

The dialogue continues on a painfully didactic level, until Alice finally enrages the Mad Hatter to such an extent that he demands her departure, and throws hats at her as she leaves.[23]

A trip through the news commentaries while Social Credit was in its early stages in Alberta makes it clear that the Mad Hatter was not the only person in "Blunderland" who considered Alice stupid. In and around the dramatic events of the strikers' protests and the human interest stories of suffering and stoicism and poverty, the newspapers of the day reported the political happenings as they occurred, little by little building up from criticism of the old-line parties to establishment of the C.C.F. and Social Credit organizations, and eventually to their startling and unexpected victories at the polls. However outspoken the various editorials may have been in their criticism of Conservative federal policies, none of them were overjoyed with the rapid rise of the new parties into power.[24] The out-of-province reaction to Aberhart's theories was a sort of outraged incredulity. With the exception of a few magazine articles which were written by journalists of some ability, the resulting comments have only the weakest claim to consideration as literature. Rather they masquerade as literature, for political purposes.

II

Material such as this arose directly from personal experience. Its writers lacked either the ability or the desire (or perhaps both) to produce enduring literature. They wrote spontaneously in an attempt to communicate their thoughts and reactions, or with a calculated purpose, to influence the thinking of others. Their writing affords a glimpse of the reactions of the general public to the life of the period, but it remains for writers of more ability, with purposes more objective, to refine these reactions and place them in a more enduring literary context.

The body of significant prairie depression literature includes several novels, a few largely autobiographical books of non-fiction, and a small quantity of poetry. Some of this material, like that just examined, was produced during the thirties and arose from the immediate experience; the rest is distanced more or less in time. But all of it bears the stamp of the author's first-hand experience of depression life on the prairies. The familiar themes are present once again, but with a change in emphasis. Unemployment becomes an undercurrent rather than a major theme, though it assumes importance occasionally.

The fruitless search for remunerative employment faces Chris, in Margaret Laurence's short story, "Horses of the Night."[25] In an attempt to finance his higher education Chris goes through the list of door-to-door sales products -- vacuum cleaners, knitting machines -- before returning, in defeat, to stagnate on his father's farm. The employment situation appears briefly, also, in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel, through the bickering of Hagar Shipley's two sons.

> "You can't stay here," Marvin said. "Look at the number of guys going to the city to find work -- Gladys's two younger boys went months ago. Even if things were better here, you don't know the first thing about farming. You grew up in the city."
>
> "I'll be on relief this fall," John said. "At least there's more space than I'd have in a two-by-four room."[26]

Marvin, offering solid older-brother advice to John, is greeted with scorn.

> "You've got everything all figured out, haven't you, Marv? You still a church usher? Maybe they'll promote you to vestryman."
>
> "I've heard about enough out of you," Marvin said. "I've worked for everything I've got, I'll tell you that. How do you think I feel when I see guys laid off every week? How do I know how long it'll be before it's my turn? Who's painting their houses these days? You're not the only one who's having a tough time. They're using gangs of unemployed on the road work right now, but I'll bet a nickel you haven't even tried to get on there."[27]

The collapse of the market, which is a motivating force in much of the American and British literature, had its influence among the people of the Canadian prairies as well. There were many small-town business men there, as elsewhere, who faced financial ruin when the market collapsed, but of most signifisance to the prairies was speculation in wheat futures, frequently by those who raised the wheat. The theme appears only briefly in the literature, in a reference at the end of John McCulloch's Dark Acres, and in a more lengthy discussion amounting almost to an exposition in Edward McCourt's novel, Music at the Close.

> Neil knew nothing of playing the market. Lowery carefully explained. "You get a broker in Winnipeg to buy you, say, ten thousand bushels on margin. All you got to do is put up a thousand dollars -- ten cents a bushel. See? All right now, the wheat is like it's yours, except of course you can't sell it for two dollars a bushel and make a dollar-ninety profit. But what you do get is any increase in price over and above the market price you bought it at. Get it? Supposin' you lay your thousand on the line today and get ten thousand bushel on margin, and supposin' the price goes up ten cents tomorrow. Then you can wire your broker to sell and you make a clear profit of ten cents a bushel minus the broker's commission -- pretty near a thousand dollars. Last year I cleaned up fifteen hundred on a three-day jump."
>
> Neil was dubious. "Suppose it goes down ten cents?"
>
> "I'm glad you asked me that, Neil. It's a point that a lot of fellers leave out of consideration when they take a flyer in the market. Well, if the price drops, you got to put up more dough or you lose your original investment. If it drops ten cents and you don't put up more dough, why you're wiped out. See? You lose your thousand. But you don't need to worry about that, not if you use your head. Sure the price skids every so often, but that don't alter the fact that she's a risin' market and is goin' to be for quite a while. Any fool can see that."[28]

As the event proves, those who see it are, indeed, the fools.

> Neil left the office and drove home. He did not dare listen to the radio next morning. But before the day was over he got a wire

> from his broker. After hearing it he went out and worked all afternoon repairing a fence that no longer served any purpose since there was no livestock on the farm. He could not bring himself to making calculations on paper, but there was no need. He knew, pretty accurately, what he had lost — ten thousand dollars in cash, twelve thousand dollars in paper profits, and all his land except Uncle Matt's original three hundred and twenty acres.
>
> But at least he could count himself fortunate by comparison with some of his fellows. That night Mr. Telfer remained behind in his office in the bank and blew his brains out. Jim Lowery, after drinking half a bottle of straight rye whisky, hanged himself from a beam in the loft of his barn. People said it was the only time in his life that he did anything that pleased his wife.[29]

The transient, that common figure in American writings on the depression, also reappears in the serious literature, though the transient theme is not a major one, possibly because the transient himself was not a new figure on the prairies. A harvest pattern had long been established which involved a mass migration of workers to prairie farms for the harvest season. But unemployment resulting from the depression had increased many times the number of men looking for such seasonal employment, and the prairie drought cut sharply into the demand for labor, so that the transients who under normal circumstances would have been whisked off to jobs on neighboring farms on arrival, now milled aimlessly about the streets of the small prairie towns before boarding freights once more and moving on. The lucky ones found occasional jobs. Ken Tilling from Hugh Garner's Cabbagetown is one of these, as are Paul Tallard from MacLennan's Two Solitudes and Colin Ensley from Roderick Haig-Brown's On the Highest Hill.

Ken Tilling's experiences provide a glimpse of the actual life of the transient, treated factually, with the emphasis placed upon the practical aspects of transient life rather than on the emotional or psychological impact. With another young man, also a novice, he is introduced to the ways of the hobo jungle by an experienced transient who shares his food with them, explains the intricacies of jungle house-keeping and jungle etiquette.

> "Did you guys eat yet?"
>
> "No, not yet," answered Ken. "That long ride through the bush is sure a hungry one. All the towns are bummed out dry."
>
> The young fellow pulled some paper-wrapped sandwiches from his pack and handed them to Ken, who shared them with Red.
>
> "They'd only dry out on me," the young man said.
>
> Later the young man took their tin cans and climbed the bank of the river behind the jungle. When he came back he placed the cans along with the one he had used in a low fork of a tree near the fire. "There are the dishes washed," he said. "The next guys to come here'll have something to mug-up in. If everybody'd do that when they stop in a jungle it'd be a better country to bum in. Live and let live is my motto."
>
> He slung his pack on one shoulder and said, "I'm going down to the stockyards to get me a drover's pass to Montreal. Take care of yourselves." 30

Later on Garner describes Ken's encounter with the R.C.M.P., who surprise a group of transients boarding a freight in Winnipeg. Ken attempts unsuccessfully to escape arrest, but is eventually thrown into jail for the night, the backs of his legs smarting from the effects of a riding crop wielded by a pursuing Mountie.

The harsh, unsympathetic attitude of the police, the implication that all transients are unwilling to work, the practice of "making an example" of those who attract the ire of the authorities, the essential mockery of justice in the attempt to enforce a law which is, under the circumstances, indefensible, all become a part of the incident. Here, again, an experienced transient briefs Ken.

> The little man threw his pack to the floor and sat on it. "This is going to be a little more comfortable than riding the tops tonight," he said.
>
> "How much will we get?" Ken asked him.
>
> "I dunno, son. Hard to say. It depends on the labour situation out at the farm. If they need labour for the potato crop we'll probably stay to harvest their spuds. If not they'll probably let us go in the morning."[31]

Colin's experiences as a prairie transient (in Haig-Brown's On the Highest Hill) provide, for a moment, a glimpse reminiscent of Algren's Somebody in Boots. In Vancouver, where he has family connections, Colin finds the policeman who questions him taking a "friendly, almost fatherly"[32] tone, but the attitude of the police whom he and his friend Curly encounter in Saskatchewan is different. Arrested for attempting to board a freight, Colin sees Curly, his companion, beaten by a policeman and is himself beaten when he attempts to interfere.

> The light snapped off and he knew the policeman had gone.
>
> Colin tasted blood in his mouth, put a hand to the side of his head and felt more blood. "Curly," he whispered, "You O.K.?"
>
> He heard Curly laugh, a nervous muffled laugh, but the voice was calmer than his own. "I bin worse. I bin lots worse."

> "What made the bastards do that?"
> Curly laughed again. "Lesson Number One, pal. Never talk back to a cop. Never, never take a sock at one. You can't win. Jesus Christ, you'd think I'd know that by now."
> Colin could feel the anger still strong in him. "They didn't have to do it. It was like they did it for sport. The dirty yellow bastards."
> "Listen," Curly said. "Forget that stuff. Dry it off, throw it away, bury it. It never happened, see, none of it. Unless you want a winter in the can. If them guys want to crucify us tomorrow morning, they sure as hell can do it." 33

They don't, and the two are given an opportunity to leave town without further trouble. Events tend to support Curly's statement that "All cops is tough -- they gotta be. But any of 'em I've seen has got a human side too." The police violence in this instance was prompted by fear, and it was Curly who launched the initial attack. For Colin, the bitterness of the experience lies in the basic injustice of the situation. Forced, through no fault of his own, into a situation which puts him on the wrong side of the law, the vagrant has no chance to win. If the policeman offers violence, resistance only compounds the crime.

> That was what made the other violence so strong and so evil. There had been no possibility of escape from it, no smallest possibility of effective resistance to it, in spite of his own move to resist. The thought made his stomach knot and his body sweat in the cell's coldness. Curly had been less than a man to them when they hit him, less than an animal even; he had been something to hurt, something to make bleed and cry and crawl, a helplessness to punish with strength, because the head had once lifted, the eyes once brightened. 34

It is the same "squirrel cage" we find later in Waste Heritage. But Colin has only a glimpse of it; the door does not snap shut. His particular squirrel cage, in which he is eventually destroyed, is of a different type.

The picture of Saskatchewan during the depression differs, depending upon whether the transient is moving to or from the prairies. Colin and Curly see it as a place where there are opportunities.

> Curly lay back in the grass and looked at the sky. "Well," he said, "they'll be starting harvest work on the prairies. That's good as any place, I guess, unless we find something better on the way."
> "You mean ride the rods?" Colin asked.
> Curly laughed. "I never done that yet and I've had me free rides from here clear back to Quebec Province a couple of times. You don't want to listen to all the guff you hear. There's lots of places to ride freights besides the rods. And most of them brakies ain't near the tough guys you hear about, neither." 35

Colin too, setting out on the transient life, is briefed by an experienced traveller.

> "How do we make out from here on?"
> "Easy," Curly said. "There's a water tank up the track a piece and they never look for nobody to get aboard there -- too far out in the sticks. You don't need to worry about nothing, not when you travel with Curly Blake. We'll be dossing down in good prairie hay inside three or four days."
> He was right. Within four days they had joined the threshing crew on a farm where Curly had worked the previous summer. 36

Sometimes the situation is reversed, and the transient is a prairie figure driven out by depression conditions. Robert Kroetsch's Johnnie Backstrom, from The

Words of My Roaring, "went east on a harvest excursion."[37] Shane Donavon from Harry Boyle's The Great Canadian Novel becomes probably the youngest transient of the period, when, at the age of eleven or twelve, he hops a freight headed east in order to escape home problems occasioned partly by depression, and partly by an unsympathetic father.

> There was an open boxcar. The fireman on the tender holding the water spout had his back turned. The other trainmen were on the side facing the station. Shane dropped the pail and climbed in the boxcar. It smelled of dry, rotted wood. He lay flat on the floor. Something stirred in a corner.[38]

The "something" proved to be old Julius. "I'm moving from my Western ranch," he said, "to my Eastern estate. And where are you going, boy?" Shane is going to his uncle, who has a farm in Ontario. He too learns from a veteran. Julius tells him,

> "Stick with me, and I'll get you to his place. . . . We better switch to the CNR . . . these CPR bulls are real bastards."
>
> It was strange and it was final. Shane was lonely in a strange world of rocks and jagged trees on cold dark lakes that was so different from the prairies. He was afraid of the chattering little man who called himself Julius, and yet he was afraid to be alone. . . . They moved into the big freight yard and he followed the man racing and dodging through the flaring lanterns and the yelling men and the scringing sound of rolling wheels on steel tracks and the panting of locomotives like tired buffalo in roundhouses. They were surrounded by noises he had never heard before, and they escaped from policemen in ways that were more like fantasy than anything.
>
> In a scraped-out hole in a hill amongst scrub trees they found, as Julius said, "friends of the road." Here were youngsters not much older than himself and the old men

5

> and young hard-eyed men and two women bundled in clothes that made them hard to distinguish from men. Here was food cooking in big tins and a society he could never forget.[39]

Shane never forgot little Julius, either,

> Julius who had taught him to cadge and beg and sometimes steal . . . Julius who, he learned later, had slipped under the wheels of a freight car in the Windsor yards and had gone with a silly squeal to his death.[40]

The transient theme appears briefly in The Drylanders, when the younger son, Russ, decides to leave home and go East in search of work. "There's no use my staying here any more," he tells his mother. "I'm just another mouth to share what little there is." She protests the decision, pointing out that he is, by nature, a farmer. But Russ has lost faith in the farm.

> "I'm sorry, Mom. You know I wouldn't leave if there was any other way. But it's no use. This country won't grow another crop till kingdom come. There aren't any farms any more, or any farmers either. All this land can raise now is dust."

The letters he sends home are carefully censored accounts of his experiences.

2)

> Dear Mother:
> I arrived in Regina about two weeks ago, but there wasn't much doing there. I hung around for a few days and then decided to move on to Winnipeg but things are just as bad here and I haven't been able to find a job. I think the time has now come to move east again.
>
> Dear Mother:
> As yet I have been unable to find a job, but I'm not discouraged. The thing to do is to keep moving and keep looking. I must say I've been doing a lot of that, and I've been seeing the country and learning a lot about life in the cities.

> Dear Mother:
> Still no luck. Sometimes it seems that the whole country is closing down. I'm still trying, but I'm beginning to think that nobody has a job for a farm boy. . . . I do hope things will soon get better on the farm, Mother. Please give my love to Dad and to Colin and Thora and the children. Meanwhile don't worry about me. I'll be alright. Your loving son, Russell.[41]

The film provides a more graphic representation of Russ's experience than the transcript does, for Elizabeth's voice reading the letters is heard against a film sequence which shows Russ tramping the streets endlessly, in an atmosphere far more wearying and depressing than the tone of the letters would indicate.

The whole experience of the transient, in the film, is presented from the point of view of those left behind. For a first-hand fictional account of the life of the unemployed drifter of the thirties we must go to Irene Baird's Waste Heritage. Newly arrived in Vancouver, Matt Striker is offered a cup of coffee by the proprietor of a small lunchroom, and is engaged in conversation.

> "Are you one of them transients the authorities is raisin' such a stink about?"
> Matt nodded. "Sure, I'm a transient," he said quietly, "I was born back in the province of Saskatchewan but that province don't own me no more. Six years now I bummed around trying to rustle up some kind of a steady job. I bummed around so long even the country don't own me no more."
> Harry's voice broke in softly, "You an' who else?"
> Matt smiled coldly. "Sure . . . me an' who else? A hundred thousand other boys. Every place we go the authorities as good as tell us, 'You boys get th' hell out of here, see? There's no work an' no prospect

> of any. Now you boys get the hell out before we citizens has to call out the police to protect ourselves'."[42]

The physical setting of the book is the west coast rather than the prairies, but many of the characters are prairie people. Their situation is the direct result of the drought in the west. Matt, like Maury in The Golden Bowl, and like Russ Grier in The Drylanders, has left home because there is no longer any place for him there. Once he has established the transient pattern, there is no place for him anywhere.

> "Why don't you go apply for one of those farm jobs, Matt?"
>
> "He's a transient," Fat horned in, mincing the word; "they don't hand out jobs to transients."
>
> Gabby grinned, taking up the chant. "He lost his domicile. Naughty, naughty, lost his domicile!"
>
> Matt smiled but his eyes were cold. "Shut it," he said to Gabby. "I heard that too often for it to sound funny any more."
>
> Charlie leant forward. "No kiddin', Matt," he said seriously. "What does that mean anyway? I thought you told me you was born in Saskatchewan."
>
> "Sure I was, but I beat my way up an' down a half dozen other provinces since and I didn't stay long enough in any one of them to establish residence.
>
> . . . .
>
> "You mean you don't belong any place at all?" Charlie insisted. "You mean if you was to go into any one of these nine provinces an' try to collect at the relief office, they could say, "'Hell, what're you doin' comin' in here an' tryin' to chisel? You don't belong on our books,' an' you wouldn't belong?"
>
> Matt nodded grimly. "That's right. The only place I could apply an' be sure of gettin' room an' board is the can!"
>
> Charlie stared at him. "I guess you wouldn't have to establish domicile in a province before they'd put you in the can?

> I guess they'd lock you up just as easy whichever of the nine provinces you come from. Kind of like a squirrel cage, ain't it?"43

The transient figure also appears briefly in W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind.

> Strange men swung down from the trains, their blanket rolls slung over one shoulder, bright flannel shirts open at the neck, their lean faces dark with coal dust. They stood before the beer parlor at the Royal Hotel, in front of Drew's Pool and Snooker Hall, or on the bank corner, waiting for the farmers who came in town, looking for bundle pitchers, spikers, and team skinners. There was harvest work for perhaps half the men who came to town, at a dollar and a half a day, the day lasting from five in the morning to seven at night.44

This was the early years of the drought. Later,

> Freights were covered with unemployed, many of them young boys who had never had jobs in their lives -- "gay cats" and "scenery hogs," who had left the East to find work in the West, or the West to find work in the East.45

Poverty itself appears occasionally from varying points of view, but it is seldom treated as a theme in its own right. Ken Mitchell treats it lightly in his short story "The Great Electrical Revolution," where the men of the family, out of work in Moose Jaw during the thirties, come to grief when their ingenious method of defrauding the power company is discovered.46 An aspect of poverty more typical of the times, the relief cars, appears briefly in several places, but always the emphasis is on the embarrassment amounting almost to shame with which the food was received, rather than on the poverty which made its acceptance necessary. There is no significant treatment anywhere in the literature of the problems involved in the distribution of government relief. This was a major task which occupied the time and energy of many prairie people, since it was a local responsibility. It is apparent from several non-fictional sources that the task was frequently bungled or mismanaged, with resulting suffering and resentment.[47] We might therefore expect it to receive greater attention in the literature. The reluctance of the prairie farmer to accept government relief is compressed by Anne Marriott in her poem "The Wind our Enemy" into a single cry of humiliation:

> Relief.
> "God, we tried so hard to stand alone!"[48]

The relief cars which arrived on the prairies carried gifts of food and clothing from more fortunate areas, which were distributed by volunteer workers. Kroetsch describes the scene in The Words of My Roaring:

> Resolutely I marched. Apples: finnan haddie: dried cod. Not exactly what stubble-jumpers dream of. But very good in the way of vitamins and minerals; Murdoch was always pointing this out, reminding us that malnutrition was rampant. I use his own unfortunate phraseology. Starvation was a word the good doctor did not know.
>
> I was marching full tilt, and suddenly it was too late to stop. Too late to turn back. I rounded a corner past the Royal Hotel, expecting an open street and more silence. The railway depot awaited me, wooden and red. A boxcar, red and gaping, awaited me; bulging with apples and cod, with potassium and manganese and calcium and zinc. People stood in line for a distance of two blocks. . . . I had hoped to get my allotment before the rush began.[49]

Johnnie, who hopes to win a seat in the provincial legislature at the forthcoming election, seizes the opportunity to do some subtle campaigning, but his overtures are not received with enthusiasm.

> Quickly I turned and began to walk up and down, chatting, being neighborly, stopping to shake a hand, asking about a mutual acquaintance. But some people yelled and asked who the hell I thought I was, the prime minister? People thought I was trying to buck the line. So I turned to those who had got their rations.
>
> One fellow said he only took his stuff because it made good pigfeed. He was abrupt with me, failing to understand my intent. A mechanic raised his pure white hands and said he hadn't worked in a year and a half and offered to kick me in the private parts. If he'd been a foot taller I'd have knocked him flat. Charity doesn't pick up the spirits the way you'd think it might. . . .
>
> Now I saw that while men were in old hats, the women by and large were wearing their Sunday hats. It was Monday. Two or three of them even had veils on their hats. They wanted to appear prosperous here, as if they came for the free handouts not because it was necessary to do so but because anyone would be a fool not to pick up something that was free. 50

The poverty here is only implied. The comment becomes more explicit when Johnnie Backstrom, attending a forced farm sale, transfers his attention for a moment from the potato salad to his surroundings. Beneath the turmoil and the surface excitement of the sale, the grim realities of poverty are apparent.

> This was in front of the house where all the furniture and kitchen utensils and everything was stacked in rows or piles on the bare ground: bedsteads and mattresses, empty sealers, a butter churn, winter clothes, an old organ, a shoebox full of postcards, extra leaves for a table that didn't seem to be present. The women folk were serving on the porch. Once in a while you got a glimpse of kids' faces in the bare windows -- the farmer wouldn't let his kids out of the house,

> though there wasn't a stick of furniture in
> the entire building. I went and looked in
> while I was waiting for the food to be served;
> that's when I noticed the front of the house
> had been painted in the last few years, but 51
> not the sides and back.

Johnny's own poverty is, of course, a subject of constant comment in the novel. If the Backstroms' economic situation had been viewed through the eyes of Johnny's wife we could perhaps have taken the situation seriously, but since Johnny's most serious financial concern revolves around the embarrassment occasioned when the family food money will not quite stretch to cover the number of beers he has offered to buy at the local bar, the reader is not deeply concerned. The novel touches Johnny's poverty, as it does other depression problems, only to glance off immediately into its usual grimly comic atmosphere.

The heartbreak of poverty is touched briefly in Anne Marriott's "The Wind Our Enemy".

> A woman's eyes could kiss the soil
> From her kitchen window,
> Turning its black depths to unchipped cups --
>   a silk crepe dress --
> (Two-ninety-eight, Sale Catalogue)
> Pray sun's touch be gentleness,
> Not a hot hand scorching flesh it would
>   caress.
> But sky like a new tin pan
> Hot from the oven
> Seemed soldered to the earth by horizons 52
>   of glare. . . .

The poverty of the thirties on the prairies seldom resulted in actual hunger; rather, its victims suffered from an accumulation of petty annoyances occasioned by the lack of cash, such as the cheap hat which Mrs. Bentley resents so bitterly.

> We're pinched already. They gave us fifteen dollars this week, but ten had to go for a payment on the car. I'm running bills already at the butcher shop and Dawson's store. Philip needs shoes and a hat. His Sunday suit is going at the cuffs again, and it's shiny at the seat and knees. I sent for a new spring hat for myself the other day, but it was just a dollar forty-five, and won't be much. [53]

Later in the novel she refers to the hat again:

> I feel such an ache tonight to be away. I ask myself how many more years like this it's going to be, the little house so still and dead, the door between us closed. All for the sake of a few hundred dollars a year. Four ugly little rooms, a hat that cost a dollar forty-five. [54]

Still later, when it appears that her husband is becoming increasingly reluctant to share his life with her, she says bitterly that "in your middle thirties it's hard to look alluring in a hat that cost a dollar forty-five."[55] There is frequent mention, too, of food problems which remain short of actual hunger. When Philip plans to take Steve into their home, she agrees it may be possible,

> "If you think you can browbeat a few more dollars out of Finley and his church board. I noticed the other night that there's nothing wrong with his Steve's appetite.[56]

She is aware also, both as hostess and as guest, of the strain placed on the family budget by the preparation of a meal for company, though she never hesitates to invite Paul or Judith to supper.

In most of the prairie literature of the period, however, poverty is the accepted background against which the authors examine the various problems that arise from it. That most people are poor is taken for granted, but the circumstances of poverty and its effect on individuals differ. It is the individual reaction to a variety of circumstances which provides the literary themes, the poverty itself being a contributing, or secondary circumstance. In Gwen Pharis Ringwood's "Still Stands the House,"[57] for instance, Ruth wants to move because the farm is a poor one which can provide only poverty for them and for their unborn child in the future. But it is the unreasoning attachment to the land which is inherent in Bruce and Hester that provides the theme for the play; the poverty merely serves as an antagonistic force.

Similarly, the stories in Margaret Laurence's A Bird in the House are concerned not with the poverty itself, but with the havoc which financial dependence works in the lives of those who receive help, and those who give it. It is not the poverty which destroys the individual; it is the dependence. The same characters appear and reappear in the various stories, sometimes as major characters, sometimes in minor roles. Edna, unable to find work to support herself, must of necessity endure the blind cruelty of her father's interference in her life; Beth, even before her husband's death, is vulnerable, living precariously on the uncertain collections from Ewen MacLeod's patients, and after Ewen's death she, too, falls under complete domination. Even Uncle Dan, usually irrepressible, must accept humiliation when he needs money.

> "What beats me," Grandfather was saying, "is how you'd the nerve to ask. Easy come, easy go -- that's what you think. It never comes easy to me, and it's not going easy, neither!"
>
> "Steady, Timothy," Uncle Dan said, as though he were speaking to a horse that had turned mean. "Steady, boyo."
>
> "Steady, nothing. You think because I sold the store that I've got a fortune stowed away. Well, I've not. And what I've got, I'm hanging on to. The taxes on this house alone -- it don't bear thinking about. Who's to look after things, if I don't? Here's Edna, keeps claiming she can't get work. And Beth and Ewen, having another baby, they've no business to be having if Ewen can't even get people to pay their doctor bills. I'd make them pay up, I'll tell the world, either that or I'd stay away from the woman entirely --"
>
> "Oh God --" my mother said, her face white.[58]

Grandfather Connor suffers too. Goaded by his own stubbornness into throwing his brother out of the house, he is stunned when his wife, usually self-effacing, quietly commands him to reverse his decision. Vanessa, equally astonished, feels "a surge of spiteful joy."

> Then I looked again at my grandfather's face, and saw there such a bleak bewilderment that I could feel only shame and sadness. His eyes chanced upon me, and when he spoke it was to me, as though he could not speak directly to any of the adults in that room.
>
> "When he gets too old to look after himself, it'll be me that pays to have him kept in a home. It's not fair, Vanessa. It's not fair."
>
> He was right. It was not fair. Even I could see that. Yet I veered sharply away from his touch, and that was probably not fair, either.[59]

It is not only the poor who are bound by poverty.

Neither, however, did everyone suffer. There were some who, through the favor of fortune, remained untouched or even prospered. One of these was Bent Candy, in W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind, who, according to Sean O'Connal's vivid report, "got his dirty han's on damn near a townships land -- scratchin' her up with his goddam tractors."[60]

> For a moment Sean was silent as he thought of Bent Candy, the caterpillar man. Candy had prospered during the dry years, spreading his crops over land wherever discouraged farmers had left; he put in acre after acre of wheat, his overhead was low, he could show a profit on only ten bushels' return to the acre. He had been lucky too; if rain fell, it fell on Candy's land; hail had stripped down both sides and around his crops but never on them.[61]

But even Bent Candy is brought down at last, victim of the levelling wind.

The levelling influence of the depression is, itself, a minor theme in the prairie literature. Caught in the twin disasters of drought and depression, everyone comes to grief, the provident and the improvident, the efficient and the inefficient, the conscientious and the careless. There were, of course, exceptions, but the general tendency was toward a levelling of inequalities. Hagar Shipley, for example, returning to Bram's neglected farm after prolonged absence, finds it no longer singular in its atmosphere of neglect and disrepair.

> The Shipley farm, I soon found, was in good company at last. However much or little they'd worked, the upright men and the slouches, it amounted to the same thing now. That must have been the worst, almost, to men like Henry Pearl or Alden Cates, who'd worked like horses all their lives, to see their places looking the same as Bram's, who'd been so hey-day, go-day, God-send-Sunday.[62]

The circumstances of the drought not only reduced the provident to the level of the improvident; they excused the Bram Shipleys of the prairies for their lack of effort.

> Our horse-drawn car pulled into the yard, and the dust puffed up around us like flour. My marigolds were a dead loss by this time, of course. I'd planted them behind the house to use as cutting flowers and they'd kept on seeding themselves, but now only a few wizened ones remained, small unexpected dabs of orange among the choking weeds, dry sheep-foot and thistle. The sunflowers had risen beside the barn as always, fed by the melting snow in spring, but they'd had no other water this year — their tall stalks were hollow and brown, and the heavy heads hung over, the segments empty as unfilled honeycombs, for the petals had fallen and the centers had dried before the seeds could form. In the patch where I had grown radishes and carrots and leaf lettuce, only the grasshoppers grew, leaping and whirring in the bone-dry air.
>
> "He's really let the place go now," I said. "It breaks my heart to see it."
>
> "What would you have done?" John said. "Hired a rain-maker? Got the ministers to pray or the Indians from the mountain to dance for clouds?" 63

The levelling effect cuts across all aspects of society: economic, social, political. Mrs. Finley, in As For Me and My House, from a superior position as wife of the Chairman of the Church Board, finds herself unable to keep up with the Joneses in the form of the illegitimate waif Steve, and his foster parents, the minister and his wife — employee, in a sense, outstripping employer.

> We've had a visit from Mrs. Finley to let us know that she thinks making a boy the talk of the town by decking him out in red handkerchiefs and cowboy hats is a poor way to

> bring him up. Her boys, too, now want a horse, and by the time the Finleys pay their debts, keep themselves decent and respectable and support the Church, they've nothing left for making broncobusters out of their children.[64]

In The Words of My Roaring, Doc Murdoch, so long politically unassailable, falls before the onslaught of "little Johnnie Backstrom" who was "worrying his mother half to death and messing his pants"[65] while the good doctor and his associates were determining the political future of the province.

The levelling effect cuts across cultural lines as well; the Bentleys, far above their small-town associates in an awareness of the aesthetic values of life, find themselves nevertheless subject to the narrow conventions of the village. Neil Fraser, in Music at the Close, in spite of his college education, is no more successful in his business dealings or his farming than is the uneducated Johnny Watson. Sean O'Connal, in Who Has Seen the Wind, aware of the possibilities of science as a weapon to fight the drought, must nevertheless watch his crops wither and die beside those of his neighbours.

Perhaps the tendency is most emphasized in Margaret Laurence's short stories from A Bird in the House. In "To Set Our House in Order," Grandma MacLeod, grim and unyielding, stubbornly resists the descent from affluence.

> "When I married your Grandfather MacLeod," she related, "he said to me, 'Eleanor, don't think because we're going to the prairies that I expect you to live roughly. You're used to a proper house, and you shall have one.' He was as good as his word. Before we'd been in

> Manawaka three years, he'd had this place built. He earned a good deal of money in his time, your grandfather. He soon had more patients than either of the other doctors. We ordered our dinner service and all our silver from Birks' in Toronto. We had resident help in those days, of course, and never had less than twelve guests for dinner parties. When I had a tea, it would always be twenty guests or thirty. Never any less than a half a dozen different kinds of cake were ever served in this house. Well, no one seems to bother much these days. Too lazy, I suppose."
>
> "Too broke," I suggested. "That's what Dad says."
>
> "I can't bear slang," Grandmother MacLeod said. "If you mean hard up, why don't you say so? It's mainly a question of management, anyway. My accounts were always in good order, and so was my house. No unexpected expenses that couldn't be met, no fruit cellar running out of preserves before the winter was over."[66]

But whether or not Grandma MacLeod admits it, the levelling influence has been at work. It started long before the depression although, if Edna is to be believed, the height from which she has descended is not as great as she pretends. Vanessa tells Edna, "Grandmother MacLeod's family were the lairds of Morven and the constables of the Castle of Kinlochaline," to which Edna replies with a short, "Castle my foot. She was born in Ontario, just like your Grandfather Connor, and her father was a horse doctor."[67] Whatever the social status of the MacLeods, Grandmother obviously feels it a great comedown that her son should marry the daughter of a man who was once a blacksmith. Because of Grandmother MacLeod's serene refusal to face facts, the depression never did succeed in pulling her down to the level of those about her. It was not until after her death and her son's, when Vanessa and her mother moved into the brick house, that Grandfather Connor achieved the levelling.

> In the kitchen, which was sweltering from the heat of the black woodstove big enough to cook for a threshing gang, my mother and aunt were unpacking. . . . My grandfather had followed me in. He looked at the plates and cups and soup tureens which were emerging from one of the barrels as my mother pulled off the newspaper and set the china on the floor.
>
> "I don't know why you're unpacking all that stuff, Beth," Grandfather Connor remarked. "It'll just have to go back in again."
>
> My mother looked up in surprise.
>
> "It's the MacLeod china," she said. "It's Limoges. I thought we'd use it."
>
> "We've got no room for it here," my grandfather said decidedly. "It'll have to go in the basement."[68]

Related, in that it too tended to maintain a common level for all individuals whatever their individual differences, was the tendency of the depression to prevent the gifted from rising. We find this situation in another of the short stories from A Bird in the House, "Horses of the Night," in which Chris, gifted and ambitious, struggles in vain to earn money for his education, and eventually enlists as a means of escape from the poverty of his family. Even this fails, and he is driven at last to Grandmother MacLeod's expedient: refusal to accept the realities of life. Only this time the myth is carried too far, and Chris slips over the brink into madness. Hearing of Chris's mental problems, Vanessa's mother comments,

> "He always used to seem so — hopeful, even when there was nothing to be hopeful

> about. That's what I find so strange. He seemed hopeful, didn't you think?"
>
> "Maybe it wasn't hope," I said.
>
> "How do you mean?"
>
> I wasn't certain myself. I was thinking of all the schemes he'd had, the ones that couldn't possibly have worked, the unreal solutions to which he'd clung because there were no others, the brave and useless strokes of fantasy against a depression that was both the world's and his own.
>
> "I don't know," I said. "I just think things were always more difficult for him than he let on, that's all. Remember that letter?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Well -- what it said was that they could force his body to march and even to kill, but what they didn't know was that he'd fooled them. He didn't live inside it any more." 69

Confinement at the poverty level was perhaps most frustrating for the Chrises of the prairies -- the young people who never had the opportunity to experience a higher standard of living.

But whether the individual is born to poverty, or sinks into it as a result of the depression and drought, the concern in the literature is usually not with the physical aspects of poverty, but with the psychological. If the food is scarce, or the diet monotonous, the circumstance may be mentioned in passing, as for instance when Mrs. Bentley comments that the occasional unaccustomed steak gives a lift to the spirits, but the emphasis is less on the poverty itself than on its psychological impact. Even in Ralph Allen's Peace River Country, where the poverty of the Sondern family is the motivation of the action, we cannot take their plight seriously since the main character refuses to do so. There is no prairie equivalent of The Tin Flute or The Grapes of Wrath, where poverty is exposed as a social evil demanding attention.

The fact that labor problems and their attendant political activities receive little attention in prairie literature is perhaps not surprising, since we are dealing with a part of the country where the unemployed did not congregate. The theme does occur briefly here and there, however, as for instance in this passage from Patricia Blondal's A Candle to Light the Sun:

> Within the railroad are special tensions engendered by the seniority principle that decrees that certain men are kept steadily on the job while others war over the leavings; but even so there is a kind of unity among them, a unity of needs, the union, a brotherhood that has a special abstract quality that goes beyond mere bargaining with the overlords. . . .
>
> The aristocrats of labor -- this was one of the few messages from the city union that had ever made sense to country-bred Al.
>
> Brace sometimes made nearly four hundred dollars a month. He worked for it, more hours than any other man in town. But there were others, on the land, who worked as hard for little or nothing. 70

Neil Fraser, the protagonist of Edward McCourt's Music at the Close, becomes involved more or less by accident in a labor dispute when he answers an advertisement for "six hundred able-bodied men for patriotic and remunerative work." The men are being hired as strike breakers, and the subsequent passage is the only literary representation of men involved in labor strife on the prairies. It discusses, in fact, about the only such incident which occurred in the prairie region -- a strike of coal miners in the Estevan mines in Saskatchewan -- and the passage perhaps contains its own explanation of why the subject received so little attention.

Neil is too uninformed to know what the implications of the situation are, and his prospective employer does little to enlighten him.

> "Listen, mister," said Neil impatiently. "What are you leading up to, anyway?"
>
> "Just this, Mr. Fraser. I and my associates are organizing a militant force to fight against and destroy utterly the forces of Communism and barbarism that are rampant in the West today!"
>
> Neil was startled. "What's the idea? Going to organize a posse of vigilantes and lynch a few Reds?"
>
> The man at the desk smiled a thin smile. "Your idea has much to commend it, Mr. Fraser. Unfortunately our society is not yet sufficiently enlightened to tolerate such a direct approach. What we are doing is organizing the Defence League of Canada. Our purpose is to enlist in the ranks of the League at least six hundred able-bodied men, all Anglo-Saxons or at least loyal to Anglo-Saxon ideals, all citizens of Canada and the Empire."
>
> Neil got up. "I thought you were advertising jobs."
>
> "We are. Jobs at double going wages."
>
> Neil sat down again. "All right, I'm listening. Let's get down to business. What's the job?"
>
> "Just this. Ten days ago, as a result of Communist agitation, the mines in the Southern Saskatchewan coal belt went on strike. Those miners were well paid, well looked after by the various companies. But the mines, with one or two exceptions, are shut down tight. Western Canadian industry is being crippled. It will be the Defence League's first job, a patriotic undertaking, to start the mines in operation again."
>
> Neil was silent. The man at the desk went on, "It is for the sake of the miners themselves as much as the public that we are

> preparing to re-open the mines. Most of the men are splendid chaps at heart, but they are ignorant central Europeans who are easy prey to crack-pot philosophies. If we can show them the futility of all this Communist-inspired agitation -- we have evidence, by the way, that the agitators are being financed directly from Moscow -- they will go back to work. For the sake of their wives and families they must be saved from fanatical leaders who are using them as an instrument of nation-wide revolution." 71

Whether Neil, in spite of what is supposed to be good intelligence and university training, is taken in by his informant, or whether he is tempted by the money, is difficult to say. At any rate, he accepts the offer and joins the strike breakers, only to find, on arrival, that the leading "Communist-inspired agitator" has no connection with Moscow whatever, but is, instead, his good friend and school mate from Alberta, Gil Reardon. He hears the other side of the story from Gil. The tale is reminiscent of the plight of the fruit pickers in Steinbeck's California:

> "I still can't see that a man on a regular salary has any gripe," Neil insisted. "Not in times like these."
>
> Gil's face was white. "Maybe I should tell you a few things, Neil. But it wouldn't be much use. Like I've said, you always were a sucker." But he went on talking, and as he talked his voice rose steadily until at the end he was almost shouting. "Sure, the men get regular wages, except during lay-offs when they don't get a red cent. And they spend those wages at the company stores, where they pay from twenty to fifty per cent more for their grub than they'd pay at any store in town. Only, if they buy their groceries anywhere except from the company stores, they get fired. And they live in rotten houses, belonging to the company and they pay nearly twice as much as the going rents. Sure they get wages -- but the company gets the money

> back. They have us by the short hairs, Neil. The men are just like so many animals and nobody cares a hoot in hell. And it's fools like you who make it just about impossible for us to do anything about the situation without fighting."

Gil comments, too, on the attitude of the farmer, reiterating the statement previously encountered in the novels of Josephine Herbst.

> "Neil, the farmer is a great guy. In a lot of ways he's the best guy on earth. But as far as he's concerned, only one thing matters, 'wheat.' As long as there's a market for his wheat he doesn't give a hoot about the industrial worker -- doesn't know he exists. But once the bottom drops out of the wheat market, he can be led by the nose by any political racketeer who has a formula for upping the price. It never occurs to him that he and the worker are caught in the same trap. And you're a farmer, Neil. You've got chaff and dust and tractor oil in your blood. There's no market for wheat -- and so you swallow a line that wouldn't fool an intelligent six-year-old. Chase all the Reds like me back to Russia -- restore the industrial economy -- and the price of wheat will go up. And if the miners live on the thin borderline of starvation -- if their wives are old at thirty and their kids rickety and half-starved and half frozen -- what's the difference so long as the Bolshies are driven out and the price of wheat goes up! Neil -- you make me sick."

The reader, in view of subsequent events, may question Gil's estimate of Neil as a farmer in practical terms, but even Neil must admit the justice of Gil's contempt for his attitude.

> "What it boils down to, Gil, is that I'm a selfish heel who doesn't know the score and doesn't care. Maybe that's it. I haven't got anything against Reds. I figure that you're doing a good thing. But I can't get worked up about it. Trouble is, I guess I've been pushed around a lot during the past few years so that

> I don't seem to care much about things anymore. Not the things that matter, anyway. I don't think about much nowadays beyond getting enough to eat and a little spare cash for bumming around. I've covered a lot of ground in the last two years. Down East twice, and all through the States. Mostly riding freights."
>
> He stared out of the window into the dimly lighted street below. "Funny thing," he mused. "During all that time I never met a single person who meant anything to me — never met anyone I wanted to see again. Something must have dried up inside me. Or maybe it was never there."

This is a denial of Steinbeck's creed, that poverty and suffering sharpen the individual's awareness of human values. But it is denied only in Neil: Gil takes the positive attitude. Neil says later,

> "I remember telling you . . . that you were the kind of guy who couldn't live without believing in something. You had to have a faith."
>
> "Well?"
>
> "Well, seems you've found it."
>
> Gil did not say anything for a while. He finished putting away the dishes, then sat down at the table and rolled a cigarette. "Maybe you're right," he said slowly. "And it's the finest faith there is. Faith in mankind."
>
> Neil opened his eyes. "Maybe," he said, "but a mighty hard one to hang on to."[72]

Irene Baird's Waste Heritage might be considered as political in theme, dealing as it does with the unrest of the single unemployed and their attempt to solve their problems through political means. But serious literature virtually ignores the rise of the C.C.F. party, and the Social Credit phenomenon appears only twice, once briefly in McCourt's Music at the Close, and later, at greater length, in The Words of My Roaring by Robert Kroetsch. As a major theme, politics simply does not exist in the depression literature of the prairies.

McCourt mentions only incidentally a political rally at which Aberhart is the speaker, and yet, in the two pages he devotes to it, he gives us an excellent picture of Aberhart, and of his influence over the people who gathered to hear him. It is the only such picture to appear in prairie literature.

> A man, massively proportioned, got up from a chair near the back of the platform and, with a kind of stealthy, cat-like grace of movement which belied his vast bulk, moved forward to the front. A wave of cheering greeted him, cheering that had in it something more than mere excitement. The man on the platform waited quietly. His face was pale, smooth, expressionless, and yet in some curious way suggestive of almost hypnotic power. Neil understood now why newspapermen called him a sleepy Buddha. . . .
>
> How many of the huge crowd really expected to receive twenty-five dollars a month if the Social Credit Party came into power Neil had no way of telling; he suspected not many. But in Bible Bill Aberhart, the man with the pale expressionless face and the sleepy eyes, they saw leadership — they saw the prospective annihilation of whatever had been responsible for their frustration and they were prepared to follow him with a kind of desperate trust in the wisdom and the strength of the prophet because they no longer trusted their own. They were a people baffled, beaten but not passive, unwilling to accept what had happened to them as either the will of God or the consequence of their own follies. And in that refusal, thought Neil, lay the secret of their capacity to endure and to fight. 73

Kroetsch's Johnny Backstrom is frankly interested in politics only for what he can get out of it. The undertaking business has not been remunerative, and his campaign for election to the Legislature of Alberta lacks funds. When the novel opens Backstrom is standing at the back of a hall in which his opponent, Doc Murdoch, is holding an election rally. Murdoch is witty at Backstrom's expense:

> "And now little Johnny Backstrom wants to sit for us in Parliament. With all his fine background, with his three years of experience as an undertaker, he wants to go up to Edmonton and run our government."
>
> I wanted simply to disappear. I slouched into myself, trying to conceal my huge frame. I couldn't even spare the three-fifty to rent the hall in that one-horse town. I had to go worming in and do my scrapping from the back row, hoping to hurl a few wicked barbs free of charge. . . .
>
> And I knew all the time that a single funeral, the cheapest kind of funeral, could save me. Just a few dollars in the old tin cash box and I'd campaign Murdoch right off the dirt roads. Out of the farmer towns and the skating arenas and the country school houses. Just one hundred dollars cash from one man who was rich enough to die; I'd be a Member of the Legislative Assembly come September. You bet your sweet life. Let the snow fly and I'd be sitting up there in the Parliament Buildings, gawking out a window at the street cars crossing the High Level Bridge. The micks and bohunks be damned; let the krauts and the crazy Swedes bury their own dead. Tough titty, boys. No more digging the grave myself to make the extra two bucks. Not for John B., M.L.A. Indemnity, they call it; nothing so crass as salary. Compensation for money that was never yours to lose. Five solid years of good green indemnification.

Johnnie Backstrom's dedication to politics being what it is, we should not expect any serious discussion of the political problems of the period. Nor do we get it, except in the occasional glimpses of the campaign which is under way. Doc Murdoch campaigns seriously, and the campaign speech which he delivers in the hall during the opening scene probably discusses serious issues. But Johnnie is not listening, and so neither is the reader.

> All of a sudden, after a very short statement, he stopped; and some joker with his arse beginning to ache from sitting too long on a nail keg had to clear his throat and chip in, "Backstrom, what you got to offer that can top that?"
>
> I hadn't heard what the that was. Mostly I heard only the creaking of benches and planks as people turned once again to face the back door. Let me say flatly that when I walked into the doctor's rented hall there in that water stop called Coulee Hill I did not intend to promise anything. But we are so often mistaken; we confuse beginnings, endings. They are so alike so often. Especially when it comes to politics. Politics, or, I might add, love. They had me cornered all right, the bastards. And then the answer came without my thinking -- I had been drinking a little; I looked at the speaker and saw he was a farmer and I said: "Mister, how would you like some rain?"[74]

In his glimpse of an Aberhart political rally, McCourt keeps our attention on the psychological aspects. Kroetsch, describing a similar gathering, takes a different approach. Aberhart reaches us, as he reached most of the population of Alberta at that time, through the medium of radio. Backstrom's unorthodox campaign promise has lured an unprecedented number of potential voters to the third of three study sessions he has organized, and since he is, at the moment of their arrival, suffering from a hangover, his position is difficult.

> The pain occasioned by the enthusiasm of dozens of female voices rendering a hymn was unendurable. But if I did not turn on the

> radio full blast I would have to talk, and those forty-odd teetotalers would inevitably and instantly recognize a whisky baritone. . . . Stocking-footed I bowed and smiled and signaled and pointed and nodded and unfolded more folding chairs, the clack of each opening chair threatening to explode my pulsating head. . . . And Applecart spoke.
>
> "That Whore," the invisible speaker said, his voice deep and ringing; sure of itself. "That Who-er," he said. "That Who-er of Babylon. Let us consider this afternoon that scarlet Who-er of Babylon."

Aberhart's address, as it is relayed to us, is much interrupted by the conversations and misadventures which take place in the funeral parlor, but the gist of it can be put together from the bits and pieces thrust in from time to time.

> John George Applecart was the leader of my party, the champion. . . . Inside of two seconds he was Who-ering this and Who-ering that. The whole works of us, we hardly dared raise our heads. But we listened, by God. We paid close attention.
>
> Sometimes we couldn't exactly follow. But we could understand. Applecart had got it into his head that things can be changed. He pointed out how everything was absolutely wrong: the price of goods bought and sold, the nature of dividends. The cultural heritage itself was threatened. He just ripped loose about everything. It made us all feel a lot better, even me. . . . "Who?" he said. He let his voice drop. "I ask you, who?" And he stopped, he left us hanging. "Who is that red beast of a Who-er?"
>
> The silence in the middle of that lull was blanker than midnight. And just then an old lady with a cane across her lap leaned toward me and whispered: "What day exactly do we expect the rain?"
>
> I damn near died. . . .
>
> Just then Applecart let out a roar. "The Fifty Big Shots," he roared, his voice crushing the silence. "That's who!" he said. "That, I mean to tell you, my dear tormented friends, is who!" . . .

> Applecart was onto the dirty Easterners who were gouging the West. He had built up to that and now he was onto them. He was talking about the Second Coming and the Last Judgment, the final reckoning of the Fifty Big Shots. Just wait, he said. And he gave them a blanket condemnation. Just wait, and in short order the wicked will be punished and the suffering good will be rewarded! . . .
>
> Vote for us, Applecart suggested, his voice hardly able to continue. He was the head of the party. Though it wasn't a party at all, he explained; it was an expression of the people's will, of divine sentiment. Then he continued: "This campaign is solely dependent on your support. This is your campaign. Send your contributions, my dear friends. Send your little sacrifices, your nickels, your dimes, your dollars --" [75]
>
> That's when I got my idea.

Johnnie passes the hat, and his political campaign continues.

Political meetings during the thirties frequently provided entertainment as well as information. This is suggested by the heckling and the by-plays at the gatherings described by Kroetsch, whether the listeners are gathered around the radio in the funeral parlour, or in a town hall. McCourt, too, notes their value as entertainment.

> "Seems like it's goin' to be quite a show," said Johnny. He was like a small boy -- eager, impatient, excited.
>
> Neil grinned sourly. "Yeah. Just like a medicine show in the old days. Noise, entertainment -- and something for nothing. Only it won't work out that way in the end. Everybody's figuring on collecting twenty-five bucks a month. They haven't stopped to figure out who's going to pay the shot."
>
> "Trouble is, Neil," said Johnny earnestly, "you just don't listen. You've been laughin' at Social Credit for a year now. But far as I can figger out, you haven't tried to understand what it's all about. You haven't done any readin' about it. And I lent you lots of literature."

> "Come clean now, Johnny. Have you got it all figured out nice and clear yourself?"
> "Mebbe not -- but then I ain't been to college. But this guy Aberhart has got somethin'. Any fool can see that. He's honest -- he's a Christian. And that's more than you can say for any of the lousy politicians that have been ridin' on our necks ever since the West opened up." 76

Johnny's enthusiasm, while it may not convince Neil, reflects the attitude of the average Alberta voter. Alberta had just emerged from a political scandal, and the appeal of honesty and candour was strong. Johnnie Backstrom admonishes himself,

> No more of your measly little promises, your chiseling lies. Get up and tell everybody, speak out, stand up straight like a man and shout, tell the goddamn truth for a change. Just for five minutes tell the goddamn truth. 77

With the voters, as with Johnny Watson, it was the apparent honesty and sincerity of Aberhart's approach that gave him his appeal.

> Johnny Watson was even more than usually voluble on the way home. "Neil, you got to admit it," he urged, "there's a real man -- the first real man we've ever had in politics. Mebbe his idea about twenty-five dollars a month _is_ screwy. But what of it? You _know_ the guy's sincere. You _know_ he's in there pitchin' for the people. If we put him in we put in a man, not a political machine. He's my man! I'll vote for him a dozen times if I get the chance!" 78

International politics, which absorbs so much of the attention of British and American writers, touches prairie literature hardly at all. Only McCourt's Neil Fraser goes off to war, and Thomas Saunders, rejoicing in the end of the drought on the prairies, compares its desolation to that which was later wrought by the war.

I did not see
Such desolation in the world again
Till in the German towns swept by the war
In man's death-strife with man: women and men
And little children, lost in the debris
Of bomb-smashed homes. Death had left its scar
On their lives too. They had the same lost look,
Sub-human, of the folk here on the farm,
In those gray, sterile days of drought and dust.[79]

III

The themes that we have found in the literature of Britain, the United States and the other areas of Canada are, then, minor in the depression literature of the prairies. The explanation for this, of course, is in the fact that these are depression themes, and that the depression itself was dwarfed in significance on the prairies by its attendant calamity, drought. Lack of money and political unrest were recurring aspects of the everyday life of the prairies. Lack of moisture, too, was a commonplace, but drought, complete and continued, struck at the very foundations of prairie existence.

It struck with a force which can only be understood in relation to the then existing prairie psychology. The vision of the west as a land of opportunity is too well known to require substantiation. It is evident in factual accounts of the many who hurried westward, ill prepared, and those who returned almost as rapidly, disillusioned, when they found the west falling short of their expectations. It is even more evident in the pioneer literature, in Per Hansa from Giants in the Earth, and in Dan Grier from the National Film Board production The Drylanders. Here the whole reaction to the west is outlined, almost self-consciously. On their way west the Griers meet a disillusioned family headed back east, full of tales of the hardships of pioneer life. The Griers themselves are divided along the traditional lines, the wife frightened and reluctant, the husband confident and enthusiastic. Looking at the empty treeless land, Elizabeth asks herself, "What are we doing here?" Dan, his homestead located, has found his Promised Land.

The "Promised Land" theme is a recurring one in pioneer literature. Stanley McMullen[80] finds it dominant in the works of Frederick Philip Grove, and he discusses the basis of the myth. "From the beginning the New World was viewed as a Land of Promise,"[81] he writes, and later, "The vision of the Promised Land as a 'New Canaan,' a place where the new covenant could be fulfilled, developed with the growth of immigration."[82] "Central to the Promised Land motif is the importance of the land itself,"[83] he continues. He interprets Grove's position as follows:

> While the land fosters the intuitive process which makes people aware that they have souls, it does not act as a deterministic force. Rather it works as a catalyst, causing spiritual development without becoming actively involved in the process. If Grove believed in any kind of determinism, it was a psychological determinism. "We are what

> we are." The individual must work out his own destiny in the search for the Promised Land. 84

The economic and agricultural conditions which existed on the prairies throughout the period of early development justified the faith of the new immigrants. The doubters had gone. Dan Grier, confident from the first, traded his sod hut for a frame home and watched his farm develop. Even Elizabeth, doubting at first, learned to trust the land and the country. Their attitude, it is clear, was shared by the community. This was, indeed, the Promised Land.

Or was it? As the drought and dust of the thirties deepened, doubt crept in. Adverse weather conditions as a temporary phenomenon could be accepted, even understood as a test of faith, but now the very land itself was disappearing, leaving behind a desolation which offered no promise for the future. Was this not the place after all? Was the Land of Promise further on, beyond the horizon? Did it exist at all? The drought, curtailing production, intensified the economic problems of the depression, but more important to the prairie farmer, it shook the very foundations of his faith.

It is only appropriate, then, that the drought, with its attendant phenomena, should provide the major themes for prairie literature of the period. The most outstanding of these phenomena was the dust, which, more than any other element, rendered life on the prairies almost unbearable during the thirties. It is as ubiquitous in the literature as it was in the land, a theme which becomes major not because of the emphasis which it is given in any one place, but because of its persistence in permeating the whole of the prairie literature -- light verse, serious poetry, journalism, short story, novel. It is so all-pervading that it requires no explanation, frequently appearing only by implication as it does when Kroetsch, describing the little "unwashed geezer" at a farm sale, in his novel The Words of My Roaring, refers to him as a "black blizzard" whose "beard was caked with dirt; the kind that blows off summerfallow, black and pure."[85] Vera Lysenko's farmers in Westerly Wild have become "dust coloured under the influence of the eternal wind."[86] Thora, in the National Film Board film The Dry-Landers, says to her husband, "I want to go somewhere where it's clean. I don't care where we go or what we do, if I can feel clean again."[87] The dust and heat together provide the atmosphere within which the bulk of the prairie literature exists. Neil Fraser moves through heat and dust to his political meeting.

> The day was hot and the dust choking. The sun rode high in a heaven of clear pale blue, its rays beating down upon an earth that cried out for rain. Across the prairies the wind blew with inexorable persistence, a wind that scorched and seared every plant in its path and sucked the last microscopic traces of moisture from the soil, leaving parched and wilted fields of grain in its wake. Neil drove slowly along the highway in his rattling flivver, man and machine enveloped in a cloud of grey dust.[88]

Brian O'Connal's grandmother, in Who Has Seen the Wind, tells her stories of the past, with the heat and dust of the present as a background.

> As she talked, the wind rose in the leaves of the poplar. It lifted the dust in the street along the front of the house; it whirled toward the center of the town in feverish little dust-devils. Thin clouds of dust hung tirelessly over the downtown streets where few people passed in front of the store buildings. 89

The heat and dust, and the hot dusty winds, provide a unifying thread throughout Mitchell's novel.

> It was another dry year with crops brown before their time, dust black against the sun sometimes for a week on end. Early in July the town lights had been turned on throughout the entire afternoon. Rain had followed, but it was too late to help the crops. And now, in the latter part of July, the hot winds breathed again, rising each evening at the end of still and burning days.
>
> In the early afternoon of such a day, Brian sat on the porch of the O'Connal house, his dark eyes lost in reflection, aware only of little slapping sounds that came whenever a breeze off the prairie compelled the poplar's leaves slightly. For long periods of time they hung listless, then with the breath of a careless wind took up their tapping again. The air was hot and dry without a hint of rain in it, or in the sky decked with high puffs of cloud. Houses across the street were submarine in the distorting lift and tremble of rising heat. 90

Hagar Shipley, returning to Manawaka in the midst of the drought, describes the same scene.

> The prairie had a hushed look. Rippled dust lay across the fields. The square farm houses squatted exposed, drabber than before, and some of the windows were boarded over like bandaged eyes. Barbed wire fences had tippled flimsily and had not been set to rights. The Russian thistle flourished, emblem of want, and farmers cut it and fed it to their lean cattle. The crows still cawed, and overhead

the telephone wires still twanged all up and
down the washboard roads. Yet nothing was
the same at all. 91

Sometimes the dust is setting for the main action of the story, as it is in "The Lawyer's Tale" from Watson Kirkconnell's The Flying Bull. Kirkconnell describes the countryside at some length, probably not so much because of its social or economic importance as because it provides excellent background and atmosphere for the grim tale he relates.

As we pushed on from Deloraine
Into the endless, treeless plain,
A slow, hot wind began to rise
And stain the sunlight in the skies
With weird apocalyptic gloom
From stifling clouds of livid grit,
As if the smoke of final Doom
Were breathing from the nether Pit.
Like ashes on the floor of Hell,
Grey dust kept sifting ceaselessly
Across the half-hid parallel
Of buried fence and ditch, as we,
Turning our gaze from side to side,
Gaped at the blasted countryside.
In bald expanses, left and right
The marl from which the soil had blown
Shone sterile in that lurid light,
The colour of decaying bone.
No honest desert was this land --
Where prickly pear and cactus grew
In smiling sunlight in the sand --
But the grey corpse of plains I knew,
Plains where strong men had won with toil
Abundant food from fertile soil;
But now a dead community
Lay stifled there in dust and heat,
Shrouded, with grim diablerie,
Under a dusty winding-sheet.

. . . .

Warm dust was in my eyes and hair;
It clogged my nostrils and my mouth;
And ever hotter grew the air
Out of some furnace in the South.
By dun, deserted homes we passed,
Into the suffocating blast.

And saw the leeward roofs all draped
With drifts of dust; and underneath,
The homes' dark doors and windows gaped
Like cavities in dead men's teeth.
. . . .
The farmyard was a gruesome place
Under that failing light of day.
I wished myself, without disgrace,
A good five thousand miles away.
Nigh buried in the dusty waves
Were ploughs and harrows, rakes and wagons,
Projecting from their sandy graves
Like skeletons of primal dragons.
But the gaunt house was still more eerie,
Bleak and unutterably dreary.
The drifting sand-blast from that home
Had worn away all paint, and left
A desolate grey monochrome
Of leprous planking, warped and cleft
By baleful heat; and at the door
The dust lay three feet deep or more.[92]

When the dust takes on importance as an individual element in the literature, it emerges as a psychological force rather than a physical one -- possibly the major psychological pressure with which the prairie dweller had to contend. It is here that the ambivalent attitude of the prairie dweller toward the dust appears. Prairie folklore is filled from the days of the first settlers with references to the extremes of the climate, extremes in which the man who regards the prairies as his home takes a sort of personal pride. Certainly nothing was more extreme, more exclusive to the prairies, than the dust storm. It was, at first, a terrifying phenomenon, but gradually prairie dwellers became accustomed to it, though never quite resigned, and eventually even, behind their despair, began to feel a sort of pride in its power and fury.

Christine Van der Mark describes its first impact vividly in her novel Honey in the Rock, as a bachelor farmer encounters it:

> In the afternoon, the wind blew more strongly, and again he watched the black whirlwinds out in the fields, and the dusty blueness of the sky. Inside the shack, he could hear the plaintive note in the wind as it rounded the corners, rattled the windows, knocked mockingly at the door, and went moaning past. Gottlieb poured water into the basin, washing his hands and face with the stinging red soap. Selecting a clean blue denim shirt from the clothes hanging among the harness, he changed, ran a comb through his hair, and put on his windbreaker. He took a hurried meal of bread and cheese. Patches came running to the gate in answer to his sharp whistle, and when he had watered the big black and white horse, he saddled up and rode off.
>
> How dry it all was, with dust following the hoofs, with a teasing wind blowing flurries of dust in front of him. The newly sown fields no longer looked rich and black with damp turned loam, but grey with lack of moisture. Gottlieb rode on at a steady jog-trot for some time. Then, thinking he heard something, he pulled Patches to a walk, even to a standstill. Perhaps he heard a car or a truck, still out of sight. He listened intently. The dull roar that came to his ears had a deep undertone not heard from an engine. At the same time, the wind struck savagely with the force of a giant fist, while the deep roar increased in volume like the waters of a flood bursting a dam.
>
> For minutes Gottlieb waited, his horse restive beneath him. Then, on the western horizon, he saw a huge black cloud approaching, rolling forward with incredible swiftness along the ground, darkening the day so that the sky was half black, half blue. The roar was the wind driving a blizzard of dust before it.
>
> Digging his heels into Patches, Gottlieb galloped to the pasture fence, and leaping down, let his horse go free. Growing in immensity, the storm darkened the sun, blackening out the sky with a roar like

> thunder. Gottlieb wrapped his windbreaker around his head, and flattening himself on the ground, lay hugging the fenceline. With stifling blackness the wind hit him, soil and seed flooding past. At his side, above the terrible crashing of the storm, he heard Patches plunge and squeal. He thought he himself would be torn from the ground, but he clung hard to the fenceline, stones and clods of earth striking him, the whine of the wind in his ears, thick choking darkness blotting out sight.
>
> Suffocating in his jacket, Gottlieb lost all sense of time. He would think the wind was slackening and begin to move, only to retreat again at a new onslaught of the storm. Only the fenceline had any reality; only the squealing of the horse seemed to link him with things living. But eventually the blackness turned to grey, and in the greyness, giant Russian thistles, like twisted ghosts in another world, went whirling over the land. The wind at last lost its sinister note; gradually a sickly sun shone through the grey haze. The storm had spent itself. Seeing through the sleeve of his jacket that it was about over, Gottlieb stirred, unwinding himself from the posts and the wire.
>
> He was all but buried in the drifting soil which showered about him as he stood up, stiff and battered. Patches was running aimlessly along the fenceline, but he turned back at Gottlieb's whistle. Gottlieb shook out his jacket, whacked at the rest of his clothes with the flat of his hand. In his earthy face, black as though he had been working in a coal mine, his teeth and the whites of his eyes glittered strangely. He pulled out his shirt tail, letting the loose dirt sift down his back. Then, pulling himself together again, he mounted Patches.
>
> Slowly he rode along the way he had come, examining his fields. They had become desert, robbed and wind-torn, rocks sticking up in them like the bones of a dead animal half picked by a carrion bird who had beat its dark wings over the land. 93

Probably the most graphic descriptions of the psychological effects of the dust are provided by Sinclair Ross. In his novel, As For Me and My House, Mrs. Bentley is driven by the circumstances of her life to solitary walks along the railroad track, with the prairie wind, laden with dust, as her frequent companion. Her comments reflect the ambivalent attitude of the prairie dweller to the more violent extremes of nature.

> It's been nearly dark today with dust. Everything's gritty, making you shiver and setting your teeth on edge. There's a crunch on the floor like sugar when you walk. We keep the doors and windows closed, and still it works in everywhere. I lay down for a little while after supper, and I could feel it even on the pillow. The air is so dry and choking with it that every few minutes a kind of panic seizes you, and you have an impulse to thresh out against it with your hands.
>
> I went into it for a while this afternoon, trying to escape. There's a lumber yard at the edge of the town, and seeing a gate open and no one around I slipped inside. It gave a safe, sheltered feeling different from the house. . . . When finally I came out the dust had thickened so that I could just see the first two elevators. The next two were dim and blurred, as if the first ones had moved and left their imprints behind. I stood a while straining my eyes to make the fifth one out, with an odd kind of satisfaction that I couldn't.
>
> Coming home the wind up the street was so strong that I could lean against it a little, relax and still not fall. When I stopped and turned my back for breath there was a wild little yelp in it, sometimes the way a coyote howls.

The dust pervades her life, as it did the lives of all prairie dwellers.

> The sand and dust drifts everywhere. It's in the food, the bedclothes, a film on the book you're reading before you can turn the page. In the morning it's half an inch deep on the window sills. Half an inch again by noon. Half an inch again by evening. It begins to make an important place for itself in the routine of the day. I watch the little

> drifts form. If at dusting time they're not quite high enough I'm disappointed, put off the dusting sometimes half an hour to let them grow. But if the wind has been high and they have outdrifted themselves, then I look at them incredulous and feel a strange kind of satisfaction, as if such height were an achievement for which credit was coming to me.[94]

But the dust is, after all, an inert substance; the wind is alive. It is the wind which captures the imagination of the prairie writers, a moving presence in all prairie literature, assuming particular importance during the years of prairie drought. It is, as the title suggests, a major theme of Mitchell's novel, a tangible presence in the life of each character as well as a symbol of the intangible presence of God.

> Outside, the wind stirred several tumbleweeds moored to the edge of the walk; it eased one out and sent it rolling jerkily down the street. It set the leaves in motion on the trees around the Presbyterian manse, where shades were drawn for coolness' sake. In the dimness of the study, Mr. Powelly's face was a pale oval. . . .
>
> The wind could be heard in a more persistent song now, and out along the road separating the town from the prairie it fluted gently along the wires that ran down the highway. Brian and Fat and Art descended and went through the barrow pit filled with loose dirt.[95]

The wind takes on special significance for those who are prairie born. Johnnie Backstrom, from Kroetsch's The Words of My Roaring, says, "I was born out here in a farmhouse, remember. The first thing you hear is the wind."[96] The wind is a companion, too, to the prairie boys in Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind.

> Down the ribbon of the road unrolling to the town, the wind sang a higher, shriller song; it whined and thinned along the pulsing wires strung down the marching poles growing smaller and smaller with distance -- black, minute crosses where the town was. Art grabbed the corners of his jacket; he held them out at his sides and leaned back upon the bellying wings he'd made. He turned and walked backwards aslant against the solid wind. 97

McCourt's Moira Fraser, listening for Neil's music "a long way off. Faint and mysterious. The way it should be," hears only the characteristic music of the prairies.

> "Neil -- what is it?"
> "Listen," he said. "Can't you hear?"
> "I can hear the wind, if that's what you mean."98

Hagar Shipley, too, is wind-conscious. "The wind was everywhere, shuffling through the dust, wading and stirring until the air was thickly gray with grit."99

It is the wind which emerges as the antagonist in the prairie depression literature. Inevitably it is personified, as it is by Anne Marriott in her poem "The Wind our Enemy."

> Wind
> flattening its gaunt furious self against
> the naked siding, knifing in the wounds
> of time, pausing to tear aside the last
> old scab of paint.
>
> Wind
> surging down the cocoa-coloured seams
> of summer-fallow, darting in about
> white hoofs and brown, snatching the sweaty cap 100
> shielding red eyes.

Alone it is mischievous; combined with dust it becomes a menace.

> Wind
> filling the dry mouth with bitter dust
> whipping the shoulders worry-bowed too soon,
> soiling the water pail, and in grim prophecy 101
> greying the hair.

Even when the wind is not high, the prairie dweller is still aware of it, biding its time, subtly menacing, as we discover with Mrs. Bentley in As for Me and My House.

> There was a hot dry wind that came in short, intermittent little puffs as if it were being blown out of a wheezy engine. All round the dust hung dark and heavy, the distance thickening it so that a mile or more away it made a blur of earth and sky; but overhead it was thin, still, like a film of fog or smoke, and the light came through it filtered, mild and tawny.
>
> It was as if there were a lantern hung above you in a darkened and enormous room; or as if the day had turned out all its other lights, waiting for the actors to appear, and you by accident had found your way into the spotlight, like a little ant or beetle on the stage.
>
> I turned once and looked back at Horizon, the huddled little clutter of houses and stores, the five grain elevators, aloof and imperturbable, like ancient obelisks, and behind the dust clouds, lapping at the sky.[102]

It is not only Mrs. Bentley who is conscious of the threat.

> Service was difficult this morning. They were listening to the wind, not Philip, the whimpering and strumming through the eaves, and the dry hard crackle of sand against the windows. From the organ I could see their faces pinched and stiffened with anxiety. They sat in tense, bolt upright rows, most of the time their eyes on the ceiling, as if it were the sky and they were trying to read the weather. . . .

The threat extends even beyond the human element.

> The horses pawed and stamped as if they, too, felt something ominous in the day. One after another the democrats and buggies rolled away with a whir of wheels like pebbly thunder. From the top of Partridge Hill where the schoolhouse stands we could see the prairie smoking with dust as if it had just been swept by fire. A frightened, wavering hum fled blind within the telephone wires. The wind struck in hard, clenched little

> blows; and even as we watched each other the dust formed in veins and wrinkles round our eyes. According to the signs, says Paul, it's going to be a dry and windy year all through. 103

The prophecy is accurate.

> For the wind and dust keep on, and their faces all are set with a numbness of anxiety. Along the road there are drifts of dust two and three feet deep. Sometimes the fence posts are almost buried. Here and there you can see a faint tinge of green, but most of the seed has been blown out and lost. Some are going to seed again this coming week, in hopes the wind won't last; but most of them think the same as Paul, that it's going to be a dry and windy year all through. 104

It is life itself which is threatened, not only human life, but all life; even behind the protecting walls of the house there is no security.

> It's eleven now, and the wind has settled to a steady blow. The walls are creaking with the heave of it. To stop the rattling I've wadded rags along the windows, but on the roof there's a shingle working loose, and every few seconds it gives a buzz and stutter. The room is filled with a haze of dust like smoke, and it sways and heaves a little with the vibrations of the walls. The bells of the fuchsia sway a little too. There are seven of them now, and still more buds, and I'm going to need a bigger trellis soon. 105

The impulse of life is there in the garden too, but constantly menaced by the dust.

> My peas and radishes are coming through. I spent a long time up and down the rows this morning, clearing away the dust that was drifted over them; and at intervals, so that I wouldn't attract too much attention, I made five trips for water. My beans are sprouting too -- I dug another up to see -- but the wind day after day keeps dry and deadly, like the current of heat that rises from a fire. 106

> My garden keeps coming up and burning down again. Every morning I creep along the rows, scooping away the dust and sand. 107

> Paul came this afternoon while I was in the garden, and squatting on his hunkers helped me clear away the dust that was drifted round my beans. 108

But there is no thwarting the determination of the wind.

> The wind keeps on. When you step outside its strong hot push is like something solid pressed against the face. The sun through the dust looks big and red and close. Bigger, redder, closer every day. You begin to glance at it with a doomed feeling, that there's no escape.
>
> The dust is so thick that sky and earth are just a blur. You can scarcely see the elevators at the end of town. One step beyond, you think, and you'd go plunging into space. 109

Mrs. Bentley wages a continual war with the drought, in the attempt to save her garden, but her scheming goes for nothing. Steve, out riding Harlequin,

> came back so grained with dust right through his clothes that I wouldn't let him go to bed until he'd had a bath. He sulked a little because there wasn't any water, and with the wind whipping it out of the pails it meant he had to bring it from the well three times. I insisted though, lecturing him sternly on habits of cleanliness. My poppies and nasturtiums were drying up, and when he was finished I planned to water them.
>
> My scheming failed, though. I told him to get into bed and leave the tub for me, but at the wrong moment deciding to be a gentleman he emptied it himself. 110

The garden finally produces a lone poppy, which flowers in her absence, and she scatters the seeds. "'Casting ashes to the wind?' an unexpected and unfeeling Philip asked, and I answered, 'Obsequies'."[111] Even the fuchsia, protected from the ravages of the summer wind, falls victim at last. "There is a howl in the wind tonight. The windows are wadded with woolen rags, but still they rattle,"[112] Mrs. Bentley reports, and a few days later, "I forgot last night to take the fuchsias and geraniums out of the windows, and this morning they were frozen stiff as boards."[113] It is as though the wind itself personified a menace that threatens to reduce all life to what W. O. Mitchell refers to as "the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky."[114] The slant of the false fronts in Philip's drawings ceases to be symbolic and becomes an actual tilt, just as the walls of the houses shake before the wind, and the Bentley's privy, that ultimate symbol of small-town convention, resists all efforts to restore its original contours and becomes the Tower of Pisa, a mockery of culture. The sense of threat is felt not only by Mrs. Bentley, but by the others as well: by Paul, by Philip, by Judith, by the little congregation seated in the Partridge Hill school house.

It is the same sense of threat, the same personification of the dust storm, that we find in Feike Feikema's Golden Bowl. It is perhaps a version of the threat which Beret is aware of in Ole Rölvaag's Giants in the Earth -- a supernatural force too powerful to be controlled, at once impersonal and malignant. The reactions to this force differ in the three books. Maury responds with defiance; Beret sees it as a retributive force from which she is powerless to escape, and she cowers in fear; the Bentleys acknowledge the superiority of the wind and wait, trapped, without expectation and yet not entirely without hope.

> The wind and the sawing eaves and the rattle of windows have made the house a cell. Sometimes it's as if we had taken shelter here, sometimes as if we were at the bottom of a deep moaning lake. We are quiet and tense and wary. Our muscles and lungs seem pitted to keep the walls from caving in.
>
> A while ago the wind and the crunch of sand on the floor used to put an itch in my fingers. I wanted to tear and shake and crush something. But it's different now. I sit quiet, listening, looking at the fuchsia till it's disappeared. In the last week I seem to have realized that wind is master.
>
> It is the same with Philip. Last night again he drew a Main Street, and this morning I looked at it and then went through his drawers to find another that he did a month ago. In the first one the little false fronts on the stores are buckled low against the wind. They're tilted forward, grim, snarling. The doors and windows are crooked and pinched, like little eyes screwed up against the sand. But in the one last night the town is seen from a distance, a lost little clutter on the long sweep of prairie. High above it dust clouds wheel and wrestle headlessly. Here, too, wind is master. 115

Perhaps each character reads into the onslaught of the wind a reflection of his own personality. Maury, in The Golden Bowl, finds in it a violence to match his own violent nature; Mrs. Bentley feels in it a strength to match her strength; Ellen, the psychologically unstable wife in Ross's short story "The Lamp at Noon," finds it a human thing, tortured like herself.

> A little before noon she lit the lamp. Demented wind fled keening past the house: a wail through the eaves that died every minute or two. Three days now without respite it had held. The dust was thickening to an

> impenetrable fog. . . . Tense, she fixed her eyes upon the clock, listening. There were two winds: the wind in flight, and the wind that pursued. The one sought refuge in the eaves, whimpering, in fear; the other assailed it there, and shook the eaves apart to make it flee again. Once as she listened this first wind sprang into the room distraught like a bird that has felt the graze of talons on its wing; while furious the other wind shook the walls, and thudded tumbleweeds against the window till its quarry glanced away again in fright. But only to return -- to return and quake among the feeble eaves, as if in all this dust-mad wilderness it knew no other sanctuary. 116

The threat of the wind reaches Paul, her husband, also, but being a farmer he felt it as a threat to his land and his crops.

> Doubled low against the buffets of the wind, he fought his way slowly towards the stable. There was a deep hollow calm within, a vast darkness engulfed beneath the tides of moaning wind. He stood breathless a moment, hushed almost to stupor by the sudden extinction of the storm and the incredible stillness that enfolded him. It was a long, far-reaching stillness. The first dim stalls and rafters led the way into cavern-like obscurity, into vaults and recesses that extended far beyond the stable walls. Nor in these first quiet moments did he forbid the illusion, the sense of release from a harsh, familiar world into one of immeasurable peace and darkness. . . . But soon the first deep sense of quiet and peace was shrunken to the battered shelter of the stable. Instead of release or escape from the assaulting wind, the walls were but a feeble stand against it. They creaked and sawed as if the fingers of a giant hand were tightening to collapse them; the empty loft sustained a pipe-like cry that rose and fell but never ended. He saw the dust-black sky again, and his fields blown smooth with drifted soil. 117

Ann Marriott, in her poem "The Wind Our Enemy," takes the collective rather than the individual view:

> Presently the dark dust seemed to build a wall
> That cut them off from east and west and north,
> Kindness and honesty, things they used to know,
> Seemed blown away and lost
> In frantic soil.
> At last they thought
> Even God and Christ were hidden
> By the false clouds.
> -- Dust-blinded to the staring parable,
> Each wind-splintered timber like a pain-bent
>   Cross.
> Calloused, groping fingers, trembling
> With overwork and fear,
> Ceased trying to clutch at some faith in the
>   dark,
> Thin sick courage fainted, lacking hope.
>
> . . . .
>
> Courage is roped with hunger, chained with doubt.
> Only against the yellow sky, a part
> Of the jetty silhouette of barn and house
> Two figures stand, heads close, arms locked,
> And suddenly some spirit seems to rouse
> And gleam, like a thin sword, tarnished, bent,
> But still shining in the spared beauty of the
>   moon,
> As his strained voice says to her, "We're not
>   licked yet!
> It must rain again -- it *will*.' Maybe -- soon --[118]

Here, as in much of the prairie literature, we find a refusal to admit defeat, to abandon faith. We find it again in Patricia Blondal's *A Candle to Light the Sun*.

> On the farms memory of the good days is kept. The older men know, they declare, that the land will come back; drought does not last; the rich times, winter vacations, new equipment will come again; but all the while they see through the younger eyes the stripped places where greed worked the damage, places a man passed daily with the thought, should've kept that stand of maples, maybe hedgerows, too late now, twenty years before they return. On the farm, too, there is trouble with the young. No men with even small substance for the girls to marry, no work in town, only housework at three or four dollars a month. The children of landowners should not have to go into service. The sons in despair. Drought at fifteen never ends; it gets into the young heart and wastes it old. From Winnipeg the

> experts sent pamphlets, sent free films, college-bred farmers to talk about erosion, but everything they advised cost money. But they came and their coming was more important than all the advice in the world. Officialdom declared it was doing everything possible. Semi-starvation worked because these men, four thousand miles and an era out of Plymouth or Liverpool, would suffer greatly before giving up the land. They stayed. 119

But not all of them. Faith sometimes wavered, in the face of continual betrayal. For some, the dust was the deciding factor. Crop failure was disheartening, but once accepted it could be put behind amid preparations for a new season. The dust was inescapable, all-pervading, affecting every aspect of life and exerting pressure that was felt both physically and psychologically. For some, it was completely demoralizing. For others it was only weather, another manifestation of the extremes for which the prairie was famous. Secure in the confidence that the rains must inevitably return, they watched while their neighbours, abandoning hope, moved on, seeking once more a Land of Promise.

IV

The problem of whether to stay with the farm or abandon it was not one which could be dealt with and put aside. For those who chose to remain, the decision had to be made anew each year. Nor was it an individual decision, or a purely rural one, or one which, at the practical level, could be made on faith alone. There were always complicating factors. Economically the problem was difficult. Some of the complications were the same as those outlined by Mrs. Henderson in her "Letters from the Dust Bowl."[120] But these were not all. The older farmer was trained for no other life, even if alternate work had been available. His choice was between one location and another. Should he leave the established farm, which had supported him and perhaps supported him well for years, and move to a new untried area to begin over again on undeveloped land -- perhaps to find, the next year, that the rains had returned and that his established farm was once more productive, for the new tenant? Or should he remain, perhaps to find that even with the return of the rains the farm remained unproductive, the topsoil blown away and only the barren subsoil left? And if he were to move, where and how? Where was he to find the money to move his possessions, establish himself once more, and support himself and his family in the new location until he had some produce to sell? Once having left the area where he had established residence he was no longer eligible for relief.[121] The economic problem hinged inevitably on the question of faith: at what point should faith be abandoned?

Where faith in the land is strongly entrenched in a man's nature, and circumstances are such that a conflict is set up between his faith and his other emotional involvements, the result can be highly destructive. The decision he must make is awesome, to him, in its implications. He cannot abandon his farm without doing violence to his inmost nature; he cannot remain without doing similar violence to those members of his family who are bound by his decision, and who do not share his faith. In its particular application in the depression literature of the prairies, the problem is complicated by the time factor. When the rains return -- if the rains return -- the problem will be solved by nature and the conflict will resolve itself. The farmer whose faith was strong enough, therefore, played for time. He could not bring himself to believe that nature had abandoned him permanently. The rains would return -- they must -- and when they did the land would produce again. The farm faith, and particularly the prairie farm faith, is built on the acceptance of the cyclical nature of the weather. Good years succeed bad years as surely as spring succeeds winter; life replaces death as surely as death replaces life. The prospect of the irreversible trend, beginning to loom ominously in the seventies, had not yet appeared in the thirties. For the farmer with sufficient faith, therefore, the solution was to fend off the tragic effects of the drought and the depression, and to endure with as little permanent damage as possible until the cycle changed. And if, as happened in Ross's "The Lamp at Noon," his wife could not endure, then she was destroyed and he must take the responsibility for his decision.

Where more than husband and wife are involved, the problem is further complicated. This is the situation in Gwen Pharis Ringwood's "Still Stands the House." Bruce and his older sister Hester were born to the land, and if left to themselves they would have tied their fortunes to it. But Ruth, Bruce's wife, is a town girl, who looks at farming as a way of making a living, and the economic folly of remaining on this particular farm is apparent to her. It is also apparent to Bruce, intellectually, and so he is torn between intelligent agreement with Ruth's point of view, and emotional sympathy with Hester's. The resulting conflict destroys all three, for Hester is driven to madness at the prospect of being torn away, and she manages to secure her position on the farm, in her own demented view, by sending Bruce and Ruth to their deaths in a blizzard.

The conflict set up in the family where faith in the land is a moving force in only one member reaches far back into the pioneer literature of the prairies. The National Film Board production The Drylanders represents, through the fortunes of the Grier family, the pattern of prairie farm life from the opening of the west until the return of the rains after the depression. It opens with a meeting between two pioneer families, one going west and the other, having accepted defeat, returning to the east. The opening conversation sets up the basic conflict -- faith versus lack of faith -- simply and clearly.

> "Got a homestead, eh?"
>
> "Yeah, that's right."
>
> "Where you from?"
>
> "Montreal. I just got back from overseas. The army."
>
> "Boer war vet, eh?"
>
> "I stayed in for a while afterwards. I wanted to save enough money to buy all this."
>
> "Ever done any farming?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Well take my word for it, mister. You're making the mistake of your life. You'd be doing yourself a favor if you turned round your wagon and go right back where you came from."
>
> "Aren't many places where a man can find free land."
>
> "No. The land's free all right. So are a lot of other things you didn't bargain for. Did you hear about the winter we had out here this year?"
>
> "Yeah. Pretty bad I heard."
>
> "Bad! Don't you believe it mister. I never saw anything like it. Lost my whole herd of sheep. Froze, standing on their feet. Thousands of cattle froze solid against the fences. I swear to God this is no country for a white man. When you're not freezin' to death you're prayin' for rain. Well, I've had enough of it. I'm going to show this whole darn prairie my backside once and for all."
>
> "Where will you go?"
>
> "Back to Minnesota, to try to scratch some sort of livin'. I guess we didn't realize how lucky we were."

Dan Grier, full of enthusiasm for the new venture, is not seriously affected by the encounter, but it strengthens doubts already uncomfortably present in the mind of his wife.

> I tried not to show him what I felt. I tried to look cheerful when we got off the train, and when he bought the wagon. Now I was really frightened. What were we doing here, a clerk and his wife, in their city clothes?

Grier may have been a city man, unaccustomed to farming, but his reaction when he finally reaches his land -- the land he is to own and develop and live with -- is that of a man with the farmer's affinity for the soil. It is the reaction, all through literature, of the man who stakes out a claim to his territory: Per Hansa in Giants in the Earth, Isak in Knut Hamsun's Growth of the Soil. This is perhaps instinctive, the mating drive of the animal locating and securing a den for his family. But man adds to this the urge to develop and increase the production of nature -- to accomplish, by labor and with the help of nature, what nature herself cannot achieve without him. His farm becomes his creation, built with his own hands from raw materials. Such a project a man does not abandon lightly, simply because nature, the same nature which helped with the creation, is at the moment uncooperative. He is too much in tune with the cyclic nature of the universe to take the swings and the roundabouts seriously.

The basic philosophy of The Drylanders supports this faith, for it sets up the cyclic pattern in both human and natural forces. The east-bound family has experienced tragedy and failure. The Griers experience the upswings of fortune, and prosper. The first movement of the drama is the pioneer story. The farm is established; it prospers; the family grows; the country is settled and the new western society develops. Then the cycle is complete and the downswing begins. The rains cease, the wind blows, the farm land and the farm buildings deteriorate. Grier, whose faith was borne out by the turn of events and who has never expected or experienced failure, is shaken, but he has no thought of abandoning his farm. He watches, day by day, month by month, season by season, as his farm -- the farm he has built -- becomes a wasteland of dust. His sons, who were a part of the farm unit, must leave the farm in search of better conditions. His wife has come through her doubts and has learned to have faith in both her husband and her land, and she is the source of strength now. Like her husband she watches the land deteriorate, and waits in vain for the rain, but she must also watch her husband as he withers beneath the strain. When finally the rain comes and the cycle turns, she is there to see it. The film closes with the return of the rain, and the implication is that the land will come back, and that the boys will return to the farm. But it is too late for Grier, who has broken down physically as he watched his land deteriorate, and he does not live to see his faith in the land justified once more. We are not told -- he says little as he watches his farm die -- but we might assume that it is his faith in the land which has died and that he cannot live without it.

It is here, in their attitude to the land rather than in their reaction to economic distress or physical discomfort, that the prairie dwellers separated into two factions during the depression -- a separation which divided friends, destroyed marriages and tore families apart. To some the drought was a temporary thing, to be doggedly endured until it had worn itself out, and when it was over, life -- the good life of the prairie farm -- could be resumed once more. Those who belonged to the prairie saw the land not as it was now, but as it had been and, they were convinced, would be again. The others saw only the dust and desolation which prevailed, and to them it was final and complete and forever. There was no future, here in this place, whatever the past may have been, and the only rational solution was flight. In "The Lamp at Noon" Ross suggests that the difference is one of character -- of the reaction of the individual to adversity under the particular conditions of the prairie drought.

> The lamp between them threw strong lights and shadows on their faces. Dust and drought, earth that betrayed alike his labour and his faith, to him the struggle had given sternness, an impassive courage. Beneath the whip of sand his youth had been effaced. Youth, zest, exuberance -- there remained only a harsh and clenched virility that yet became him, that seemed at the cost of more engaging qualities to be fulfilment of his inmost and essential nature. Whereas to her the same debts and poverty had brought a plaintive indignation, a nervous dread of what was still to come. The eyes were hollowed, the lips pinched and dry and colourless. It was the face of a woman that had aged without maturing, that had loved the little vanities of life, and lost them wistfully.[122]

Certainly the division, as we have seen, is not along the lines of sex. Sometimes it is the man, sometimes the woman who loses faith. Nor is it a question of strength and weakness. Christine Van der Mark begins her novel In Due Season by introducing a family in which the husband has broken and fled, leaving his wife, Lina, with the farm responsibility. Both desert the prairie drought area, he through weakness, she through strength. But loyalty to the land is here, too, in Lina's father Benjie. On the eve of their departure,

> The old man gazed out of the curtainless window at the gloomy countryside.
> "Lived round these parts goin' on thirty-two years," he said, leaning his chin in his hand. "Too bad Sym didn't like the place. We might ha' made out all right. I used to, when I was a younger man." 123

Possibly Lina represents a third reaction to the drought. She expresses her attitude the next morning when her father and a friend are discussing the family's departure for a northern homestead.

> Duke Watson came up on horseback. He was approaching eighty, but his back was straight, his eyes keen-sighted.
> "So you're leavin', Ben?" His white horse pawed the ground.
> "I'd as soon stay, but it ain't fair to my girl." Benjie sighed, looking with longing at the ridge of rough hills from which they had come. His motionless horses stood with drooping heads, while the cow chewed deliberately. Gypsy lay flat underneath the wagon.
> "We've had tough times," Duke remarked . . . "but some day she's gotta rain again." Duke's far sighted eyes in his brown lined face scanned the horizon thoughtfully. "The land's good, if we could just git water. Some day, there'll be irrigation. Some day, Ben -- "
> "And in the meantime we all starve, or go on relief," Lina's voice broke in. She tossed a bag of groceries into the wagon, and swung Poppy in after them. "Well, I didn't mean it just like that." The woman's tone was kindlier as she looked up at the old man. "But Duke, it don't seem it'll be better for a good long time. And when you got a kid, you got to think of that too." 124

This appears to be a qualified faith in the land. It will come back, but Lina cannot afford to wait for its recovery. Or is it, instead, denial of the land, softened out of respect for the feelings of the two old men? We are left, at the end of this introductory chapter, with the suggestion that Lina is leaving behind nothing of any great value. "The dusty road lay ahead, the days of toilsome travel in good weather or bad. Lina went outside into the misty light. Somewhere there was pasture and well-watered land."[125] This feeling of belonging expressed by the two old men is stated more explicitly in the Ringwood play "Still Stands the House." Bruce is a young man, recently married, and he has a good offer for his land which has not produced a crop for five years. Unlike many of the dried-out farmers, he has an alternative. Yet still he hesitates to leave the farm, even though his wife pleads desperately for the move to better irrigated land, closer to town. "We may get a crop this year. We're due for one," he tells her, and tries to explain how he feels about the land.

> Bruce: My father came out here and took a homestead. He broke the prairie with one plough and a team of horses. He built a house to live in out of the sod. You didn't know that, did you? He and mother lived here in a sod shanty and struggled to make things grow. They built this house. The finest in the country! I thought my son would have it.
>
> Ruth: What is there left to give a son? A house that stirs with ghosts. A piece of worn-out land where the rain never comes.
>
> Bruce: That's not all. I don't suppose you can understand. . . . Those rocks along the fence out there, I picked up every one of them with my own hands and

> carried them with my own hands across the field and piled them there. I've ploughed that southern slope along the coulee every year since I was twelve. . . . I don't want to leave it. I don't want to give it up.
>
> Ruth: But it's poor land, Bruce.
>
> Bruce: Yes, it's strange that in a soil that won't grow trees a man can put down roots, but he can.
>
> Ruth: You'd feel the same about another place, after a little while.
>
> Bruce: I don't know. When I saw the wind last spring blowing the dirt away, the dirt I'd ploughed and harrowed and sowed to grain, I felt as though part of myself was blowing away in the dust. Even now, with the land three feet under the snow, I can look out and feel it waiting for the seed I've saved for it. [126]

The same dilemma faces Big Joe in R. R. Annett's loosely connected series of short stories, Especially Babe. Like Bruce, Big Joe is bound to the land by emotional ties.

> "Poor little tykes!" Lord Willy said bluntly. "Having to grow up in this god-forsaken place!"
>
> "It was a good country once," Big Joe growled. "An' it'll be a good country again."
>
> Lord Willy glanced out the door at the shadowy rain-drenched prairie. He shivered -- either at the dreary prospect or because he was wet and cold.
>
> "But what a lonesome place to bring up kids in!" he said.
>
> That wasn't the way it looked to Big Joe. But then Joe had memories of the good years. Memories of Emmy. The place where his memories lived could never be lonesome to him. [127]

The rain in this extract is not the life-giving flood symbolizing the end of the drought which we find in many pieces of literature. It is one of the "too little and too late" rains which were given to the prairies at infrequent intervals during the drought, and it is treated with typical prairie humour. "It's sure gettin' to be a wet country," Uncle Pete said. "Rained only last year, an' here it is rainin' again!"[128] Nevertheless Big Joe's decision to stay on the land is not entirely emotional. He believes in the future, in spite of strong opposition. His attempt to get credit for his next year's operations elicits the following response from his banker:

> "Lookit, Joe," he said at last. "You take them kids outta this country and I'll help you all I can to get away. But to put in another crop -- My God, you're dumb, Joe! Won't you ever realize it's quit rainin'? It ain't ever goin' to rain no more here."
>
> "It's gotta rain some time," Big Joe insisted.[129]

But perhaps this is not so much faith as stubbornness, a refusal to face the fact that the move is necessary simply because he cannot face all that the move entails, in emotional turmoil as well as practical problems.

> Miss Hansen said that the government was being generous paying six dollars an acre. There wasn't much land in the district that was worth that price any more. People could use the money to get started in another district. Miss Hansen didn't seem to realize that it took more than just land and buildings to make a home. It took years of toil, years of bright hopes and bitter disappointments, good years and bad years, joys and sorrows -- births and deaths even.[130]

Whatever the real reason, Big Joe, like many others, asserts his faith in the land. Paul ("The Lamp at Noon") answers his wife's cry of "Look at it -- look at it, you fool. Desert -- the lamp lit at noon -- " with a quiet "You'll see it come back. There's good wheat in it yet." This is the dogged statement that is repeated over and over throughout the literature and history of the drought. For some it is a statement of faith; for others, perhaps like Big Joe, wishful thinking -- a reluctance to accept the permanent end of the good life of the prairie. Believing, or pretending to believe, they could avoid the necessity for tearing up roots and seeking another home. For this reason even those who were intellectually convinced that the land was finished were reluctant to admit defeat.

The Griers in The Drylanders, divided in their attitude to the land from the beginning as we have seen, were another family torn apart by the depression. Russell leaves the farm and joins the crowd of transients seeking work in the East. Colin and his wife, Thora, remain on the farm, but they, too, show signs of the strain. The situation is brought to a head at the supper table one night, when Colin is driven to the breaking point by his small son's complaints about the monotony of the food. He is immediately repentant. The situation precipitates the following conversation between husband and wife:

> "Go ahead -- say it."
> "You shouldn't have hit him, Colin. He doesn't even know what good food tastes like."
> "I know. I'm sorry."
> "How long are we going to go on like this, Colin? Colin, look at me. Remember how I looked when we were married?"
> "Oh Thora . . ."
> "Do you still find me pretty? Do you? I know what I look like. A dried out old woman."

"I don't know what you expect me to do!"
"Let's leave. You're young. We can start in again somewhere. I want to go somewhere where it's clean. I don't care where we go or what we do, if I can feel clean again."
"Leave!"
"It's what you've been thinking yourself, if you'd only admit it Colin."
"We can't leave the farm. It's all we've got."
"Got! What have we got! A farm that wouldn't even belong to us if we had to pay our back taxes."
"I don't want to talk about it any more."
"Do it for Danny and Sigurd. Don't they deserve something better than this? You're not answering because you know I'm right. You don't want to stay here any more than I do. It's only pride that keeps you here. The great Grier farm has to go on, doesn't it? Well, look at it -- look at your wonderful farm. Why don't you admit that you're beaten? You're beaten, Colin. Admit it!"

The conversation is interrupted at this point by Elizabeth's cry for help. Dan has collapsed, and sinks into a coma from which he does not recover. As they wait together for the doctor's verdict, gathered in the kitchen, Colin returns to the problem of the future, this time arguing for departure, while his mother refuses to leave.

"Mom -- I want us to go away from here -- all of us. Somewhere and get a fresh start. Somewhere where they've never even heard of the word drought!"
"Colin . . ."
"Well what are we trying to prove anyway? Sitting on fields we can't even work? Living on handouts? We've given it nine years. Let's get out now, while there's still time."
"It isn't a question of trying to prove something. It's a question of where you belong. Thirty years is a long time. Well -- you'll have to do what you think best, son. But if you go, you'll have to go without your father and me."

The conversation ends there, interrupted once more, this time by the death of Dan Grier. Later Elizabeth as narrator fills in the ensuing period.

> Now the land seemed completely dead, for Colin. He wandered over it the way Dan had done. He felt the way I had felt thirty-one years before. This country was too hard. I watched him, and I knew his despair. But I also knew something I had learned from Dan: You couldn't stop hoping.

Among those who do not lose faith in the land are Anne Marriott's farmers in "The Wind our Enemy." They, too, suffer to see the contrast between the land as it is, and as it used to be.

> The wheat in spring was like a giant's bolt
>   of silk
> Unrolled over the earth.
> When the wind sprang
> It rippled as if a great broad snake
> Moved under the green sheet
> Seeking its outward way to light.
> In autumn it was an ocean of flecked gold
> Sweet as a biscuit, breaking in crisp waves
> That never shattered, never blurred in foam. 131
> That was the last good year. . . .

Like Josephine Herbst's farm couple, they endure the pain of watching their animals suffer.

> Horses were strong so strong men might love them
> Sides groomed to copper burning in the sun,
> Wind tangling wild manes, dust circling wild
>   hoofs,
> Turn the colts loose! Watch the two-year-olds
>   run! . . .
> But now
> It makes a man white-sick to see them now,
> Dull -- heads sagging -- crowding to the trough -- 132
> No more spirit than a barren cow.

But even in the face of repeated disappointment, they continue to hope.

> They said, "Sure, it'll rain next year!"
> When that was dry, "Well, next year anyway." . . .
> (Watching the futile clouds sneak down the north)
> "Just empties goin' back!" 133

Like Dan Grier, Paul, Bruce and Big Joe, the old couple in Ann Marriott's poem feel the inevitability of the cycle of nature. Perhaps too they wait and endure for the same reason that forced Benjie to leave: they have no other choice. The new beginning, which is the only alternative, is for the young. When life is too far spent the commitment has been made, and there is no turning from it. In Vera Lysenko's novel Westerly Wild also, the farmers remain because they have no choice; they cannot afford to leave. They have no money to see them through the trip to the north. Faith in the land, a hope of better things for the future, is no part of their philosophy. They have no desire to remain; they are simply unable to escape. Loyalty to the land, hope for the future, are far from their thoughts as they listen to the glowing praises of the north country in a letter from a former neighbour.

> The letter ended, "It's hard to think of people in southern Saskatchewan roaming about the country hoping to find a spring or lake. Don't wait until you lose everything, try a homestead up north."
>
> At this advice there were cries of protest from the women. "We can't get out," exclaimed Mrs. Johner. "It's too late. After all our heavy crop failures, we're stuck here." 134

Perhaps we should add to the list Neil Fraser from Music at the Close, who was trapped in a different way. Neil became a farmer originally more by accident than design, and he left at the first opportunity.

> The return to the farm had for him a peculiarly nightmarish quality; he was doing now what he had vowed two years ago he would never do, he was coming back defeated among the people who knew him best and who had expected much of him; and he was coming back to the kind of life he had grown to hate. He could not understand Moira's almost joyous acceptance of the situation; indeed, it was only at her insistence that they had come back at all. 135

If he had not been forced from his land by depression conditions he would probably have left it voluntarily at the first opportunity. For such people the situation was not tragic. Whether they moved northward or joined the army as Neil did eventually, the agricultural conditions were perhaps only an excuse for abandoning a life they disliked.

Neil's failure as a farmer is pointed out to him by his wife when he decides, impulsively, to join his neighbour in a move to the Peace River country. He tells her,

> "The way I look at it, Moira, is like this. The land here is worn out, sour. Even if we do get lots of rain again, the crops will never amount to much. And I'm so sick of it all -- sick of seeing you drudge from day to day with nothing to work with -- nothing to look forward to -- no money to buy even a jar of cold cream or a pair of decent stockings! You weren't meant for this kind of life, darling -- you hate it as much as I do -- and I'm going to take you away from it. If we go north, start all over again with good land, in a year or two -- five at the most -- we'll be on easy street!"

Moira refuses to be swept off her feet.

> "I'd love to go, but we can't."
> "Why not?"
> "Because, Neil, we just haven't got the money. If you got a homestead we'd be nearly a hundred miles from a railroad, off in the bush country. It might be romantic for a

> few weeks, but we'd starve to death eventually. You know that as well as I do. And cultivated land is a far higher price than it is here. Oh, I know it's a grand place to dream about. But, Neil, we've got to face facts. . . . And besides, Neil, if you're honest you'll admit that most of what's happened to us here is our own fault. We've been here four years, and we haven't got rid of a single weed. Our farm is the dirtiest in the country, and it's getting worse all the time. It's not that the land is sour, Neil, and you know it. It's just that it's neglected, only half-cultivated. It's our own fault that we're in a mess, not nature's."
>
> "Nice of you to use the plural," he said. "All right, it's my fault. I'm a rotten farmer. So what? Whose idea was it that we come back to the farm?" He tried to talk quietly, deliberately, but he could not keep his voice from rising.
>
> "It was a choice for you of coming back to the farm or going on the bread-line. If you were honest with yourself you'd admit it."

She clinches her argument with the news -- welcome in itself but unwelcome in its implications -- that she is expecting a child.

> Afterwards, when Moira was asleep, Neil lay on his side staring out of the window into the glittering moonlit night. There was no escape now, and he knew it. He was chained to the farm come good or evil. And in his heart there was neither peace nor resignation -- only bitterness, and a slowly gathering resentment against the woman who indirectly had helped to fashion his chains. 136

This, then, is the other side of the coin. We have been seeing the prairie farmer as a man driven reluctantly from the land he loves by adverse circumstances; Neil, forced back to land for which he had no affection, finds that these same circumstances prevent his escape.

The farmer who appears in the creative literature of the period either remains passively on his land and waits for better conditions, or admits defeat and leaves in search of a better location or a different job. He does not even consider, apparently, any active attempt to solve his problems, to do anything to mitigate the conditions which are destroying his livelihood. Yet men who pioneered in the west, who were capable of the fortitude and ingenuity and industry which established the prairie farm economy in the first place, would not be content to sit idly with folded hands, as Grier in The Drylanders apparently does continuously (with short interludes of wandering through his devastated fields in solitary despair) for a period of five or six years. Nor would they accept abandonment of the land as the only alternative. Yet what other course was open to them?

Their problem was a double one; in order to remedy their situation they must restore the productivity of their land, and having accomplished this they must then restore the economic balance of the agricultural industry in the west. The first problem is a scientific one; the second, political. A glance at the history of the period shows us that there was much activity in both areas among prairie farmers during the depression. New tillage methods, irrigation, the return of much cultivated land to pasture -- these were the scientific remedies for the loss of productivity. The attempt to remedy the situation by political means has already been considered. These activities involved a great deal of work which must have left prairie farmers little time for sitting on their front porches watching the dust blow and bemoaning their fate, yet we find little evidence of other activity in the literature. There is a suggestion of the scientific approach in W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind. Sean O'Connal, in the early part of the book, lashes out against the farming practices which have brought his southern Saskatchewan area to the brink of agricultural ruin.

> "Awful! She's plum awful, Gerald! Stupid!" he cried. "They never hearda strip farmin' an' they don't wanta hear! 'Plant yer crops,' I tell 'em, 'in strips acrosst the prevailing winds -- fight the wind an' fight the driftin' -- stop clawin' her plumb back fer wheat or oats or barley or flax! Farm her with yer hearts an' brains, you stubble-jumpin' sonsa hunyacks! Get off her black prats an' raise some pigs an' cattle too! Fergit yer goddam little red tractors an' yer goddam yellow-wheeled cars an' yer trips to Washington an' Oregon an' California!
>
> 'Jist look at her -- creased an' pocked an' cracked -- no grass to hold the topsoil down! That's what happens when you crop her out an' away fer the winter -- then back agin in the spring to scratch at her agin -- on agin off agin an' away agin! You wanta travel an' so does she! I seen her travel on a first-class ticket by air -- she's bin to the Coast with you -- a thousand million sections of her -- black cloudsa dust blacker than all yer greedy souls -- lifted up an' travelin' clear to Jesus!'" 137

Although Sean cannot interest his neighbours in his agricultural methods, at least they give him some personal satisfaction.

> And for the first time in years, Sean O'Connal was almost happy; his garden irrigation project had worked wonderfully well. He set about trying to interest other farmers in the district in a plan he had to dam the river and irrigate larger areas of drought-baked land. 138

Scientific agriculture is a background theme of the novel.

> "How is your irrigation project coming, Sean?" asked Maggie O'Connal ominously.
>
> "Huh? Oh -- that!" Sean's voice dropped to almost normal conversational level. "Got the dugout done and the main ditch dug -- she's right where the tilt of the land runs off the water." His voice had become gentle now. "Oh -- I tell you she's gonna be lovely -- tuh see the rows a carrots liftin' their feathery heads -- the radishes an' the scallions. There'll be head lettuce crisp an' green. I'm plantin' melons -- they'll grow," he practically crooned, "ah -- they'll grow prettier than all the scarlet-coated cardinals at Rome -- an' there'll be the sweet smell of water on the air above me green-garden, while" -- his voice took a skip and a jump -- "while the goddam wheat gits baked crisper than bacon fried in the firesa hell!" 139

The reluctance of his neighbours to become involved in his agricultural projects is a constant source of frustration for Sean.

> Like most others in the district, Sean's crop was a failure, and each time he looked at his wheat parched with brown and burnt along the edges, the acid of his anger ate deeper into his soul. His flourishing garden that summer no longer soothed him. He had met with little success in his attempts to interest other farmers in an irrigation scheme that would dam the river. 140

Where he fails with his neighbours Sean succeeds with his nephew Brian, who is influenced through his Uncle's stormy harangues on the subject, toward a career in scientific agriculture.

> "Do you think Brian will be takin' over the store?"
>
> "It's a long time yet," said Maggie. "You seem to have put an idea in his head."
>
> "Me? What?"
>
> "He says he'd like to be a -- dirt doctor."
>
> "Dirt doctor!"

> "He's heard you say that the prairie's sick. Evidently you've told him what has been already done about rust -- that there could never be another rust year like 1935. He has mentioned a new wheat too -- being developed in Russia -- a perennial." Maggie gazed a moment at Sean. "I'm told that you think it would be the -- clear rig for this country -- for feed -- to prevent soil drifting. Brian tells me it wouldn't winter-kill. His last composition for Mr. Digby was, 'Why People Should Raise Cows in Southern Saskatchewan'."[141]

The irrigation project appears briefly in other places in literature. Lysenko's anti-hero in Westerly Wild succeeds in keeping his farm an oasis in the desert of dust, but like Sean O'Connal he cannot interest his neighbours in his methods. The scientific approach is suggested here and there in the pre-depression literature also -- in, for instance, Wilfred Egglestone's The High Plains. But nowhere is prairie irrigation given serious consideration; always it is the brain child of a single character. Only Mitchell and the agricultural journalists of the time discuss the scientific approach to the farmers' problems in any significant depth.

V

For the man who decided not to wait out the situation on his prairie farm, the usual solution was a family migration to the northern part of the province. Since the rains had deserted the southern prairies, the farmer followed them. Johnnie Backstrom gives us, with his characteristic pretense of flippancy, a glimpse of the forced farm sale which preceded the trek north.

> I didn't know until I arrived; it was the walleyed farmer selling out. An old drinking pal, you might say. I hadn't recognized the name on the poster. He was making sale to beat a mortgage company; they'd served notice Saturday evening, while the poor man was listening to Murdoch's spiel. They were seizing his crop, which didn't give them much to take hold of, if the field beside the lane was any indication. The gophers had to kneel down to get a bite to eat. And by Friday when the high officials arrived to seize his possessions, they'd find an empty house and a barn and a couple of other buildings that were too big or too rickety to move on skids. It was a cash on the barrel head sale, take your purchase and run.
>
> I got there just at noon, just as some neighbors' wives were getting ready to dish up the free lunch. It was quite a spread; potato salad until I thought I'd burst, and pork and beans in big pots, bread and biscuits and lots of scalding hot coffee. None of the usual finnan haddie. Everybody seemed to be having a fine time.

But resentment is here, just as it was at the political meeting and the relief car.

> The farmer . . . was walking around, trying to pretend he had something to do, not saying too much but staying away from where the actual bidding was in progress, as if he didn't want to embarrass any of his neighbors. They were helping him out, themselves too, keeping an eye peeled for bargains; thus the need for a man of mediating conscience. . . .
>
> "I thought I might talk politics a little," I said, "if you have no objections."
>
> "Hell no," the farmer said. "I'd like to see a good rain, so when the mortgage company comes in to harvest they'll make a real mint."
>
> "I mean to talk politics," I said, "not rain. And the first thing we've got to do is change the law so these mortgage collectors can't throw a man off his land on such short notice."

> The farmer hit his own head with the wooden spoon that would still be his for another hour or so. "Maybe you could make the interest rates higher, so a fellow wouldn't be tempted." He winked around with that peculiar eye of his. "At only twelve per cent, by Harry, I was unable to resist."[142]

One of the best representations of the trek north is found in Arthur Storey's Prairie Harvest, a book which has the appearance of autobiography though it is treated as fiction. Storey's characters watch as the migrants begin to pass through the Haultain district near Saskatoon, on their way north.

> It was at the end of July that the wagons and "Bennett buggies" began to arrive from the south. The Toreys had heard of the drought and sandstorms. The weekly farm paper that came in the mail had carried a series of pictures and an article on what was happening over a large area in the south-central and southwest of the province. It showed fences, machines and even small buildings covered by drifting sand. The people who now began to pass the farm were the victims of this drought.
>
> "Could we get water for our stock?" a voice asked, as David was feeding the horses before supper early one July evening.
>
> David put down his forkful of hay and looked up. He had never seen so thin a horse or so gaunt and weather-beaten a man.
>
> "Sure," he said, without knowing the full implication of the request. He looked west to the pasture in the direction from which the man had come. Most of the quarter mile of road from south of the pasture gate to the south corner of the fence was occupied by wagons, livestock, machinery and people. . . .
>
> As they approached the gate at the railway crossing the long line of migrants stopped. They stopped from the front to the rear like a freight train, as if each unit had to run into the one in front of it in order to realize it was to stop its slow shuffle. The late summer dust settled on the long column as it halted.

> "Are you stopping here for the night?" David asked.
>
> "Yes," the man replied fatalistically, as if there were no choice; then added, "if you think it would be all right."
>
> "There should be grass enough on the road allowance for the night," the boy said; then, fearing he was being inhospitable, he indicated the triangular eight acres beyond the crossing where the railway cut off part of the pasture quarter, and suggested that they might camp there if they would rather.
>
> "The road will be fine," said the man, doubtful that the boy had authority to offer grass to the half-starved strangers.

The migration continues during the summer.

> By mid-October, when the last of the wagons for the season appeared, the Toreys were supplying hay and oat bundles to the travellers. . . . The names of Maple Creek, Swift Current and Moose Jaw became household words with the Toreys, as did those of the smaller centres around them. Hopelessness, poverty, the land of broken dreams, were the feelings attached to these places. Tisdale, Melfort, Meskinaw and other unheard-of places were mentioned with hope by the travellers. 143

Christine Van der Mark's In Due Season shows the trek north from the point of view of the migrant.

> Lina's little procession passed prairie homes where women and children waved; passed blown-out fields and dried muck lands where the soil cracked gapingly; passed long weary stretches of prairie where cattle bones lay bleaching in the sun. Sometimes they stopped for water at the well of a neighbourly farmer, and sometimes they paused on the road to feed and rest the horses and snatch a hasty meal.
>
> As night began to come on, they drew up at the gate of a grey farm-house in which the lights were beginning to glimmer. Handing the lines to her father, Lina stepped down over the wheel. As she walked through the yard, her heart beat heavily, for it was hard to be asking favours of strangers. The door opened, revealing a short broad woman with iron grey hair done in a tight knot.

> "I'm Mrs. Ashley." The light fell on Lina's strained face. "We're moving north, my father and me, and we was wondering -- We have our own bedding. I wouldn't mind for myself, but Daddy is quite old, and then there's my little girl." She hesitated, smiling wanly. "But we wouldn't want to put you out."
>
> "A little girl too!" The woman's voice was kind. "My dear, come in. I'll call my husband. I thought I seen a wagon coming down the road. No, just sit down, Mrs. Ashley, I'll see to everything. Joe will look after the horses. Now you just sit down and have a cup of coffee."
>
> "That's real kind of you."
>
> "Our name is Peters," the other woman said. "There's Joe now talking to your father. I'll just go and bring them in."
>
> Soon they all sat down to a generous meal. With his sandy brown hair standing on end, eyes peering under his shaggy brows, Joe poured coffee with a steady hand.
>
> "We seen several families trekking north. They seem to get along all right, too." He looked admiringly at Lina.
>
> She leaned forward at her place at the table, her face full of eagerness and courage.
>
> "It's real thrilling, Joe. Like an adventure."
>
> "That's right," the other woman broke in. "But I don't know but what I'd as soon stay home." 144

Vera Lysenko's heroine Julie, in Westerly Wild, coming to southern Saskatchewan to teach school during the thirties, meets a family leaving the country before she sees those who are staying. In the resulting conversation there is none of the joyful anticipation of the new beginning, only the frustration and defeat of departure.

> "There's not a farmer had a crop this year."
>
> Johner might have gone to elaborate, but there now came into sight a strange procession, consisting of an old Cadillac drawn by a team of horses and filled with people, while behind the Cadillac bumped a wagon containing furniture, a few implements and a cow.

> "Why horses?" asked Julie, struck by the oddity as the car advanced toward them.
>
> "They can't afford gasoline. Cash is short in this part of the country." Even at a distance the scratches were visible where the dirt had worn the paint off the metal.
>
> By now the car had come close enough so that Julie could see the occupant's faces, parched as the earth, and as grim. Their personalities had become dust-coloured under the influence of the eternal wind, and all lightness and joy had vanished, even from the faces of the children. Dumb, despairing rage showed in their grim lips and smouldering eyes. As they approached, the family leaned out of the window to stare at Julie, and she could hear the remark, "She's not from this part of the country. Too fresh-looking."
>
> There were eight children, Julie counted, all lacking the bloom of youth and all dressed in rags. . . . Julie could see from the appearance of the people that they were of sound farming stock which had once formed the backbone of the country. The man had a powerful, raw-boned frame, and there was power, too, in the huge knuckles which stood out in the hands, while on his face was an emotion like that of a prizefighter who had just been dealt a knock-out blow." 145

The travellers, not realizing the new teacher's ability to read faces, are willing and even eager to recount their whole pathetic experience to her in the brief encounter, so that the full extent of their tragedy is made clear to the reader. The resulting conversation reflects the bitterness and frustration of the man who has lost everything and must begin again.

Ethel Chapman's hero in The Homesteaders is another of the defeated farmers who turns his car into a Bennett Buggy for the trek north, but here, as in the rest of the book, the human and emotional aspects of the move take precedence over economic considerations. Not realizing the implications of her request, a young woman reporter who has been seeking a feature story at a barn-raising has asked to be taken back to town over almost impassable roads rather than spend the night in a crowded farmhouse. Her apology, after the trip has been successfully completed, is passed off lightly by her escort.

> "Out here we're used to every sort of road and weather. I have been through some tight places with this old engine and she's almost as intelligent as a horse. I'm going to hate to part with her."
> "You mean you're going to sell your car?"
> "No, just the engine, I think. I'll be making the rest of it into a wagon or buggy, something for horses to draw. I'm going north to look for land next week and I won't need a car there."
> "But your farm here . . .?"
> "I can't hold it." He spoke with the humiliation a farmer feels when he has to give up the land he thought was his own. "I could stay on for a while -- the bank's awfully decent -- but with five bad years running and no knowing when it will be any better, I'd rather square away things while I can. I'll still have all the stock I need to start a homestead." 146

There are several factors which differ in this situation from that illustrated in Westerly Wild and Prairie Harvest. Unlike the migrants in these two books, Chapman's hero is young and unattached. He leaves behind him what was a youthful hopeful beginning, but he is young enough to start again without any great sense of personal defeat. He has failed only himself, not his family as well, and he goes north, not perhaps so much driven out by the drought, as drawn by the prospect of establishing himself in circumstances which will make it possible for him to marry the girl he loves, who is also facing the threat of unemployment and economic failure.

The new start, the establishment of a home in the new land of Promise, provides a theme for some of the depression literature. Not all of the migrants travelled north. A good many moved, instead, to the west coast, and their experiences are reported in a newspaper article by A. F. Menzies, published in the Western Producer in the spring of 1937 and later included in a collection of the author's work, with the following introduction:

> I append the following article for no particular reason except that I sort of like it myself. Driven to desperation by the cruelties of the Great Depression, we had sold our printing business in a Saskatchewan town late in 1936, and had eked out the winter at the Pacific coast as a free-lance writer.
>
> "A Little Place at the Coast" . . . reflects the general spirit of defeat which existed everywhere following seven years of world depression, during which the standard of living had sunk lower and lower while warehouses were stacked to the ceiling with all the good things of life.
>
> Indeed, the article so well reflected the times that it came near to making me famous. Letters of appreciation poured in from all corners, from people I had never heard of, and in short, "A Little Place at the Coast" was about the only good thing the depression did for me.

The following extracts are from the article itself.

> During my own thirty years of residence on the prairies most of the people I knew sooner or later left for the Coast. A few left because they could afford to leave; the rest left because they couldn't afford to stay. And, oddly enough, both classes were actuated by the same motive -- to get 'A little place at the Coast.' Three acres of land, a cow, a pig, a stand of bees, two rows of potatoes, three fruit trees and

> sixty hens. . . .
>
> Having little to do during the last three months except poke my nose into other people's affairs, I have hunted out a lot of these prairie refugees who have little places out here, and I think that my findings may be of interest, especially to those who may be experiencing a gnawing desire to own three acres of land, a cow, a pig, a stand of bees, two rows of potatoes, three fruit trees and sixty hens on the Pacific Coast.
>
> X X X X [sic]
>
> Mr. A. came from -- let us say -- Quill Lake. He has two acres, all of it under stumps except the portion occupied by the house. The stumps can be taken out at a cost of forty dollars each. Mr. A. has a job firing in a sawmill, though the work does not agree with his back. When he gets steady work he can save enough out of a year's wages to take out one stump. There are 311 stumps on his little place.
>
> Mrs. B. hails from Watrous, and she began life at the Coast with a large drove of hens on Lulu Island. The hens lost money right from the start, and she was hardly sorry when they all died of roup. Now she has an acre on the mainland, and no hens. She is happier and loses less money than she used to, even when she was farming at Watrous. . . .
>
> Mr. E. is from Melville. He has a steady job in a mill, and hopes to have his little place paid for in another three or four years. He denies himself hens and some other luxuries, but he keeps a cow, thereby shouldering a loss which some poor dairy farmer would otherwise have to carry. . . .
>
> Mr. F. has hotel accommodation for 2,000 hens, but he has no hens. He did have hens, then he thought better of it and got a filling station instead. He says there is more fun in the filling station, because there are nineteen other filling stations within a mile to share the total loss with him.

The article concludes with the following summary of the situation:

> Down at the mills, of a morning, stand groups of male help who have come to see if they are wanted. They never are -- or hardly ever. Once

> in a blue moon one of them lands a job, but the usual verdict of the boss is 'No openings today.' But they are courteously treated by the mill owners, for they have a value. Nothing contributes so much to the 'contentment' of an industrial worker as to see a crowd of busted farm hands standing outside the gate.
>
> At random I choose one of the group, and make speech with him.
>
> "Stranger," I say, "what part of Saskatchewan are you from?"
>
> "Hanley," he replies, a bit wistfully. "I farmed there for eighteen years. Now I have a little place out here — three acres. If I could get a job here in the mill for a while, I'd be allright. I figure I could make my living off that little place if I had a cow, a pig, a stand of bees, a few rows of potatoes, two or three fruit trees and fifty or sixty hens." 147

The depression, as far as we can tell from the literature, did not greatly change the way of life in the northern part of the prairie provinces. Those who fled to the north, in effect, left it behind. We find this in The Homesteaders. We find it in Barbara Cormack's The House. This book is set in the north from the beginning, and the depression is something outside the lives of its characters, except when they venture into the devastated south of the prairies.

> The great Depression of the 1930's changed the plans of many people, with its great business retrenchment. Bob Jackson found himself in the city without a job. He had not done as well in Calgary as in Edmonton, and was by no means so firmly established. After tramping the streets for weeks on end, looking for a job, he turned up once again at the Culvers' door to, as he put it, ride out the storm. 148

There were perhaps two reasons why it was easier to "ride out the storm" in the north. The obvious one, of course, is that the drought did not extend to the northern parts of the provinces, with the result that the farmers there were able to raise their own food and remain independent of the general economy to some extent. Psychologically, too, this was an important factor, for if the reward for labor was small or nonexistent in terms of money, it was nevertheless very significant in terms of satisfaction, for the northern farmer reaped, every year, a very tangible reward in the form of a good harvest. Less apparent, but equally important, is the stage of development the country had reached. The southern prairies had come through the pioneer era and had enjoyed, for some years prior to the depression, the comforts and security of an established economy. The pioneer, beginning with only raw land and a minimum of equipment, expects to live close to the poverty line, to make what he cannot buy, to get along without what is unavailable to him. It is built into his attitude to the whole pioneering experience. Intrinsic, also, is his expectation that when he has invested the time and labor necessary to develop his land, when he has served his apprenticeship, life will be easier and his rewards will be greater. The north was still pioneer country; its people had no expectations of ease or plenty. The pioneer and depression conditions were so nearly alike that the thirties brought them few problems they would not, as pioneers, have encountered even if times had been prosperous. They expected nothing better. The southern farmer, no longer a pioneer, found himself plunged back into conditions worse than those through which he had struggled as a pioneer. His land, far from waiting full of promise for development, seemed irretrievably ruined; the promise which the virgin land holds out for the pioneer was replaced by no certain hope of better things in the future. The northerner had only barely reached his Promised Land; the promise was yet to be fulfilled.

The promise, of course, never is quite fulfilled. Disappointment is inevitable -- unless, like the migrants in Ralph Allen's Peace River Country, the destination remains a shimmering vision on the horizon, dwarfing the problems of the present into insignificance with its promise for the future. The novel is pure romance. It tells the story of a woman attempting, under difficulties, to provide for her children. Bea Sondern's husband is an alcoholic, much loved by his wife, but left behind, rather than deserted, because she recognizes that he is not good for the children. The trip to Peace River is undertaken partly as flight from him, and partly as a journey to a celestial city, always visible on the horizon, always receding into the magical distance. Harold, the practical one of the trio, knows in his heart that they will never reach it. His mother and his little sister Kally, who share the invaluable ability to live for the moment, leave worrying for tomorrow, and enjoy today's good fortunes even when they are imaginary, look forward confidently to the day when their journey will be complete. When they get to Peace River Country, all their problems will disappear. Sometimes they even manage to convince Harold.

Mrs. Sondern repeatedly finds herself homeless and without any tangible prospects, but she wastes no time worrying about her situation. Rather, she assumes that things will work out, and is concerned instead about the fact that her situation worries other people. Arriving in Elevator, with no place to live, no money, and no prospects, she comes to the attention of a kind railway official who is concerned about her situation and offers help. "The poor, poor man," she thinks sympathetically, "Why he's worried sick."[149] It is a characteristic reaction.

Nothing really bad can happen to Bea Sondern and her children. Misfortune does not thrive where it is ignored. The husband, still much loved and comforted, is accidentally killed at the end of the book, and they need flee from him no longer. But the Peace River Country is still there, glimmering on the horizon, distant but beckoning. They progress to Calgary from Moose Jaw. Homeless once more, they decide to consult the Traveller's Aid about a place to stay, but first,

> "Let's go and see about the fare first," Kally said. "Just so we'll know."
> "Yes," Harold said eagerly. "Let's do that first, Mother."
> "All right," Mrs. Sondern said.
> They walked across the rotunda of the waiting room together and the children pressed

PEERLESS BOND

> close in behind as Mrs. Sondern stepped up to a vacant wicket.
>
> "I wonder if you could give me some information about fares to the Peace River Country," Mrs. Sondern asked.
>
> "Certainly," the man behind the wicket replied. "I'll just get the Northern Alberta schedule." In a while he came back. "It's quite a long way," he said apologetically, as he thumbed over the time table. "It's a lot further from here than most people think. Just a minute now."
>
> They stood close together beside the wicket, waiting. 150

The depression is a background for the story, but it, like the other problems in the Sonderns' lives, shrinks into insignificance in the light of their cheerful optimism. The depth of kindness and generosity which the Sonderns seem to arouse in the hearts of almost every chance acquaintance is unprecedented. Mrs. Sondern, curiously inept at almost everything she attempts, is ineffectual to the point of disaster even as a washerwoman.

> For the first year she was there, almost everybody who sent washing out sent it to her, and she attacked each wash with happy, optimistic ferocity, hurling socks, towels, table linen and colored shirts and dresses into a foaming bath of suds and then beating the whole mixture into a pulpy mash with a broomstick handle. Little evil-smelling blobs of wool floated through it and became imbedded in the fabric of unaffiliated underclothing. Colors ran and realigned themselves in sensationally incompatible combinations. Woollen socks shrank and hardened vilely, and lesser fabrics slowly disintegrated under the assault of strong lye soap and physical violence. Sometimes, late at night, when the children were asleep, she found herself in tears for her customers' underthings and for the beauty of spirit which prompted them to suffer,and suffer again, without reproach. 151

Such beauty of spirit, on a large and general scale, is not usually encountered, and the reader may be excused for some passing doubts. But the book makes no pretense of realism. In the end, the one unpleasant character in the story is satisfactorily routed, charitably forgiven, and right triumphs. The depression, in such a universally charitable world, can hold no terrors. Mrs. Sondern's optimism is vindicated, and even Harold, his practical common sense in abeyance for the moment, stands with his mother and sister and gazes rapturously toward Peace River country as the novel ends.

VI

There was little romance in the lives of those who remained behind on the dusty prairies. For them, the shining vision on the horizon was the rain cloud which would put an end to the drought. Its inevitable arrival was awaited with varying degrees of confidence. But there were, among those who chose to remain or were trapped on the prairies, some who had no confidence in the future of the country, who accepted defeat, and were destroyed.

The depression casualty is perhaps overemphasized in depression writing. The bodies did not rain quite as thickly from the tall buildings of New York after the market crash as the reports would lead us to believe. But it was inevitable that some, particularly those with already existing mental problems, should break under the strain of depression conditions. The suicides in business circles after the market crash were the result of a sudden blow which swept away the accumulated wealth of a lifetime. There were, as we have seen, farmers speculating in wheat, and in other investments as well, who met the same fate.[152] But for the prairie farmer whose business activities were restricted to farming, the pressures were different, the reaction slower. He too saw his life work destroyed, but not overnight in a spectacular crash. Rather he saw it dwindle away bit by bit, in a slow painful process. There was no finality in his defeat; always he was tantalized by the possibility of a reversal of fortune at any moment -- a promise far more within the realm of probability than the arrival of the prosperity which the business man told himself was always "just around the corner." The prairie farmer, too, waited for prosperity to bring better prices, but more desperately he hoped for rain to restore the productivity of his land. The reward for his labour was a good harvest; the money that harvest would bring him, essential as it was, was secondary. The economic return to prosperity, however close its beginning, must of necessity be a long slow climb. Nature responds more rapidly and more positively. All the farmer needed, to change failure to success, was a change in the weather, and the whole farming enterprise on the prairies rests on the certainty that, whatever else the weather may be, it is changeable.

The prairie farmer, then, in addition to the same economic pressures which were felt by other businessmen, lived with a continual promise that never quite materialized. If his faith was strong enough he was sustained by the hope; if it was not, the uncertainty, coupled with his other problems, thrust him over the brink into mental depression which sometimes resulted in suicide.

One such man is Jim Beynon-Jones in Watson Kirkconnell's "Tale of the Abandoned Farmhouse," who hanged himself in his desolate farmhouse because he had abandoned all expectation of plenty. His troubles were personal as well as economic, but probably his personal tragedies, too, were attributable in the final analysis to the conditions of drought and poverty in which the family lived.

"It was the worst year of the drought,"
The lawyer said, and looked more grim,
"That Jacob Beynon-Jones came out
To find his lost twin-brother Jim.
I still can see his hawk-like face,
Its unforgettable design
With brow of most excessive space
And nose grotesquely aquiline.
It was a scorching August day
When he arrived in Manitou
By taxi, and was forced to stay
When the rear axle cracked clean through.
He was the most impatient cuss
And kicked up an ungodly fuss,
Demanding, furious and profane,
To go at once to Deloraine.
As I was going out that way
On business, in my Ford coupé,
I asked the man to come with me
The hundred miles for company.
Feeling the obligation strong,
He told me, as we drove along,
The reasons for his present trip;
For he had just arrived by ship
From England, and had come out West
Upon a most surprising quest.

"My name is Beynon-Jones," he said.
"I have a lost twin brother, Jim,
So like myself, from heel to head,
That none can tell me quite from him.
Back home in Devonshire as youths,
Black rivalry in love estranged us.
Through ten grey years of lies and truths,
In that, at least, Time has not changed us.
I wed my blue-eyed Susan, Sir,
But Jim one night, as I had feared,
Impersonated me with her
As husband, and then disappeared,
Taking my honour and my cash
To distant lands in one fell smash."

After brooding on his wrongs for ten years, Jacob receives, shortly after his wife's death, a cable from Jim, coming from Deloraine and saying simply, "I shall be waiting for you here." So he has come to find his brother, "a black revolver strapped securely underneath his arm."

The two reach Deloraine where the C.P.R. agent who has sent the wire, after he has been duly startled at the resemblance of Jacob to his brother, gives them grim news of Jim's circumstances.

"Three months ago he called in here,
Excited-like, and full of smiles,
To send a cable; but I fear
He hasn't been in town since then.
He's one of the unluckiest men
You ever saw. This cursed drought
Has dried the plains completely out.
Most of the farmers out this way
Have left their farms this many a day;
Then both of his young children died
Of 'flu' last autumn, more's the pity;
His wife then took a one-way ride
Back to her folks at Crystal City;
But Jim refused to leave the spot;
He lives alone there on the farm,
Feeding himself God knows what.
I hope he doesn't come to harm."

Jacob, whose reaction makes it clear that he does not share this hope, invites the lawyer to continue the journey and the two set out, rather against the lawyer's will; Jacob, like the Ancient Mariner, has "a dark hypnotic eye / That mastered me, I knew not why." The description of the countryside through which they travel is, as we have seen, realistic, but the story departs at this point into fantasy. Jacob calls upon the devil to help him find his brother, the car stalls and the two men wade through the dust to the nearest farmhouse. They eat a meagre lunch in the deserted kitchen and go to sleep in an adjoining bedroom, only to be awakened in the middle of the night by "unearthly talk" which

> Came from a figure by the door,
> A towering Form that seemed to walk
> With shambling feet across the floor,
> And point impatient to the stairs
> And gibber loudly and rejoice.

The apparition leads them upstairs where they find brother Jim's decaying body hanging from a rafter. The lawyer flees in terror, pursued by

> My crazy comrade, weirdly black,
> With the cadaver on his back,
> And on his face such hate and scorn,
> Such hideous likeness to the other
> In livid hue, I could have sworn
> The corpse was carrying its brother.
> "Lend me a hand," the figure said.
> "The rumble-seat's the place for Jim."
> So there we propped his nodding head
> And made the cushions soft for him.
> Into the front seat then we climbed;
> Somehow or other, in my heart,
> I knew Hell had that engine primed
> And that the car would surely start.
>   At my first touch she gave a bound.
> Quickly I turned her nose around,
> And started back across the plain,
> Racing, hell-bent, for Deloraine.
> My nerves in no time were a wreck;
> For how could sanity keep sweet

With madman's breath upon my neck
And carrion in the rumble-seat?
On, ever faster, past control,
We neared the town across the prairie,
And crashed into a Hydro pole
Beside the civic cemetery.[153]

The madman is killed in the crash, and the two brothers are buried together, sleeping uneasily, one suspects, in a single grave.

The drought is the pervading setting of the poem, but it is chosen, obviously, not because Kirkconnell is particularly interested in the period itself, but because its grim desolation had impressed him on some previous occasion and is entirely appropriate for his purpose. Like the ironic use of the Hydro pole and the cemetery and the other trite rhymes throughout the poem, it contributes to the contrast which establishes the mood of the story: a contrast between grim theme and light, fast-moving verse.

Ann Marriott treats the suicide with more human sympathy in her poem "Prairie Graveyard."

Two graves apart by the far fence
are suicides, one with a grand
defiant tombstone, bruising at the heart
"Death is swallowed up in victory."
(And may be, God's kindness being more large
than men's, to this, who after seven years
of drought, burned down his barn,
himself hanged in it.)
The second, nameless, set around
with even care-sought stones
(no stones on this section)
topped with two plants, hard-dried,
in rust-thick jam tins in the caked drab pile.[154]

One is reminded of the bleak little cemetery where the Lawsons, in As for Me and My House, buried their son.

> The cemetery is just a fenced-in acre or two on the prairie. There are dry, stalky weeds on the graves, and you can see where gophers and badgers have been burrowing. When the service was over and the others had gone Mrs. Lawson started crying again that she didn't want anyone belonging to her left in such a place.[155]

The comic mask which is Johnnie Backstrom's shield, in Kroetsch's The Words of My Roaring, fails him when his friend Jonah dies, and the tragedy breaks through.

> I'll tell you the God's own truth -- I sat there and I cried. Hot tears scalded my cheeks. Because, and this is the reason, I knew where Jonah was. I had known all afternoon, in a sort of unacknowledged way I had known, and I hadn't been able to say; I just simply could not bring myself to tell those coppers, drag out there where the lake has no bottom. Where she is bottomless. They searched where the fishing is good, where a man could get tangled in the weeds; cops are apt to think that way. And all afternoon I had known where Jonah was, out far, far out, with the anchor rope around his middle, in the one place he was sure to choose. [156]

Much less tragic is his own contemplated suicide.

> I reasoned with myself for a long time -- I had to make amends, and I'm not ashamed to admit it, suicide itself was among the possibilities. I thought of my wife actually shedding tears, the neighbor women heaping the kitchen table with cookies and salads and pies, scrubbing the floors. The men in various beer parlors: well, I guess old Backstrom finally did it, as I knew he would, just parked his hearse on the railway tracks. Was it his nagging wife that drove him to it? Odd bird, he couldn't handle his liquor. Car troubles, somebody said; plus fear of getting no votes. I recognized: that damned rag of a Notikeewin newspaper would have a field day: BACKSTROM SHOOTS SELF: HOLE IN SOCK FINALLY OF USE.
>
> But I also knew what my luck is like. Big Backstrom, the belt buckle gave while he was hanging himself, he broke both legs on the edge of a chair.
>
> Or even if I did succeed, that pudgy deaf atheist of a hardware dealer would get

> the customer, unwilling to charge a decent price. 157

More frequent than suicide was mental breakdown, temporary or permanent. In Arthur Storey's Prairie Harvest we find it treated with characteristic prairie humour.158

> Albert Nickelson was bitter, but his sly sense of humour was a saving feature. He told Henry of seeing a demented man being taken by train to the asylum at Battleford. "He thought he was a ball player," said Albert, "and every little while he would get up and deliver an imaginary ball down the corridor. Yep," he added, "another crop like the last one will drive me north to catch for him." 159

Kroetsch gives us a representation of a type of mental abberation that was a frequent result of depression problems, the religious fanatic. The occasion is the forced farm sale, where Johnnie Backstrom has come mainly for the purpose of eating potato salad and making political hay. He greets the interruption to these activities without enthusiasm.

> I was all warmed up and ready for action. So out of nowhere this little unwashed geezer had to butt in; he was five feet tall, dressed in a heavy overcoat. On a day like that one. He practically came right out of the farmer's armpit. . . . This little heap of rats had not seen water in his whole life, you could tell at a glance. You could tell without glancing, if you had half a nose; and I am well endowed in that vicinity. His beard was caked with dirt; the kind that blows off summerfallow, black and pure. He looked like a human dust storm. . . . This black blizzard presumed he was going to administer a blessing rather than shake hands; he raised his right arm, his old overcoat slipping back to reveal a dirty bare wrist: "I am the prophet," he announced again. . . . "The sinner shall suffer for his sins," he said. . . .

> "Absolutely," I said. "That's why He sent this poor innocent man a plague of Eastern moneylenders! . . . When those Eastern hogs get finished in the trough," I said, "there's nothing left for the rest of us. Look at this poor man having to hold sale, a man who never did any wrong in his life. Where is the justice?"
>
> "The punishment," he said, "is coming from Heaven. . . . The sinners are getting the suffering they earned." . . .
>
> But the farmer was worked up about his auction sale: by-Harrying this and that. "Do you suppose I'm selling out and leaving just for the hell of it? Do you think I want to take my family out on the road with no place to sleep, by Harry? Do you think for a minute I asked that mortgage company to do what they're doing?"
>
> "You're lucky," the prophet said. "You're probably the luckiest man alive." . . .
>
> "I sure am," the farmer said. He tried to make out he was laughing. "I'm a blessed and fortunate man, by Harry."
>
> "The world," the prophet said, "is coming to an end tomorrow. Get rid of your earthly possessions. Prepare for the final judgment."
>
> "But there's a stampede and dance in town tomorrow," somebody said. "Couldn't you make it the day after?"
>
> That brought the place down.[160]

Saint Sammy, too, from Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind, finds religion a safe haven from the problems of prairie farming. As Sean O'Connal describes the situation,

> Yearsa gittin' rusted out an' saw flied out an' cutwormed out an' 'hoppered out an' hailed out an' droughted out an' rusted out an' smutted out; he up an' got good an' goddam tired out. Crazier'n a cut calf.[161]

Frequently in depression literature as in pioneer literature it is the women who break down mentally. Beret in Giants in the Earth is the classic figure of the pioneer wife and mother who cannot cope with the immense loneliness of the prairies. Her counterpart in the prairie depression literature, the tormented wife in Ross's "The Lamp at Noon," we have already met. The madness of Hester, in "Still Stands the House," also results directly from depression conditions, but for the opposite reasons; the others cannot bear to remain on the farm — she cannot bear to be parted from it. The mad wife secreted in the upper rooms of the hero's house in Vera Lysenko's Westerly Wind probably owes her situation more to Jane Eyre than to the depression in western Canada. Certainly the barren realities of prairie life contributed to her mental illness, but her problems, though they are set against a background of rural life in Saskatchewan during the depression, pre-date the thirties.

The humor as well as the pathos of farm life during the depression appears occasionally. Roy Daniells' poem "All Through the Thirties," illustrates the pragmatism which sustained farm life in the face of economic collapse.

> All through the 'thirties, south of Saskatoon,
> A farmer farmed a farm without a crop.
> Dust filled the air, the lamp was lit at noon,
> And never blade of wheat that formed a top.
> One New Year's to the hired man he said,
> "I have no money. You must take the deeds.
> And I will be the hired man instead,
> To shovel snow and fork the tumbleweeds."
> So it was done. And when the next year came,
> "Take back the farm," the other had to say.
> And year by year, alternate, just the same
> 'Till the war came and took them both away.
> With such superb resource and self-possession
> Canada made it through the long depression. 162

The humor in Thomas Saunders' "Amos Bulgin" is more grim.

> Amos Bulgin farmed here
> For nigh on three-and-thirty year.

The first ten year, on virgin soil,
He reckoned money for his toil.

The next ten year the land grew tame:
The money didn't come the same.

The third ten year his hair grew grey:
He saw his savings melt away.

The upshot is, for all his sweat,
Amos Bulgin died in debt.

Now nature has her little whim:
The land that fed him feeds on him.[163]

Farmers who remained on the prairies saw more than their savings melt away. They watched the slow deterioration of farms in which they had invested a lifetime of toil, and they said good-bye to friends of long standing. The parting with old friends was not the least of the sorrows. In The Drylanders, while Dan Grier remains to wait for the rains and watch his farm deteriorate, his friend, Bob McPherson, who has shared and overcome the pioneer hardships with him, pulls up stakes and seeks, quite literally, greener pastures. The two men and their wives exchange farewells, when the McPhersons pause briefly at the Grier home on their way north. Elizabeth watches them leave, her voice in the background narrating her thoughts.

> Good-bye to dear Bob and Ada. We never had better friends, and we knew we'd probably never see them again. A part of our life was leaving with them. They weren't the only ones to leave. . . . One by one other families pulled out. . . . The Campbells, Tim and Sally Calhoun; after a while it was as though we were living alone in a haunted desert. By 1938 Dan was a beaten man. It broke my heart to see what these nine years had done to him. He had retreated into himself;

> for days he wouldn't talk. He just wandered around, trying to understand why the prairie had betrayed him -- the prairie that once was so good to us.

For those who remained behind, the decade of the thirties was a time of waiting. Patricia Blondal, in her novel A Candle to Light the Sun, refers to the period as "the long open-eyed sleep."

> That's the way it was. The long open-eyed sleep.
>
> Although more than twenty years dead, it lives still in the remembering twilight behind our eyes. There's thirst a man can't slake.
>
> 1936. Mouse Bluffs hesitated and slowly drew up the out-rolled hope, paused and called in the future so that it might not be scorched by the incessant sun, its eyes destroyed by the drifting sifting soil, called in the future to hide behind the wet rags hung against the door frame so that it might not be blown to nowhere with the dry brown tumbleweeds.
>
> Wait. The quality of waiting was virtue in plain men. God made no promises. The land must be thought upon, not watched. Men whose fathers had followed the slow feet of Sir Richard Rashleigh's oxen knew that Mouse Bluffs was not expected to prevail; none of the quick hot dreams of wealth had ever come to Mouse Bluffs; God expected only that it endure.
>
> The town does not grow. Or diminish. It is a bare seventy-five years old, yet there is a permanence about it.
>
> The river bends wide to the bluffs. Below Crescent Avenue the valley spears a cleft of green for perhaps a mile through the prairie. When the wind blows and the dust heaves and twists with maniacal persistence, when the women wet rags and sheets to cover doors and windows, sit listening to the wind tearing the top-soil from the farms, forking it against the town, when the sky is pasty-grim with lost farms, the eyes gritted and rimmed with lost farms, and famine is the wind's brother, even then you can cross Crescent to the rim of the valley, go down the one hundred and eight wooden steps, cross the meadows and stand beneath the great oaks, smell the air sweet and green, hear the wind only distantly, its monotonous hunger

> eased by the tremble of the creek as it joins the river.
>
> 1936. The wind blows the promises thin, the fears in. Against the time the oaks stand. When fall comes and crops are bad, the acorns under the oaks are so thick walking there is difficult. The leaves turn to blood and gold, go down to cover and nurture the acorns for the year to come. The town knows there is a harvest. . . .
>
> How thin we were upon the land. 1936. How untouching we were, with all the miles between us, the thin fine soil in the air between us. How thin the land made us, parching our lips, stretching fine the bones to unmuscled waiting. How it paid us out, whose fathers had made the land thin. Our sins stood thick upon the thinness of our worth, thick between us and the low red sun. 164

The desolation of the abandoned countryside, and the bewilderment, provide the theme for Frederick Laight's poem "Drought."165 It is a passive poem, reflecting the attitude of the man who waited, without any particular faith in either God or nature, simply because there was no alternative.

> I have seen tall chimneys without smoke,
> And I have seen blank windows without blinds,
> And great dead wheels, and motors without minds,
> And vacant doorways grinning at the joke.
>
> I have seen loaded wagons creak and sway
> Along the roads into the North and East,
> Each dragged by some great-eyed and starving beast
> To God knows where, but just away -- away.
>
> And I have heard the wind awake at nights
> Like some poor mother left with empty hands,
> Go whimpering in the silent stubble lands
> And creeping through bare houses without lights.
>
> These comforts only have I for my pain:
> The frantic laws of statesmen bowed with cares
> To feed me, and the slow, pathetic prayers
> Of godly men that somehow it shall rain. 166

The simple faith of the farmer, the attempts of the government to cope with the situation -- the one "pathetic," the other "frantic," -- seem equally inadequate in the face of the tragedy Leight sees around him. But there were many godly people, men and women, who were sustained during the depression by such prayers.

For those who were not sustained by any strong faith in either God or the country, prairie life during the thirties was difficult. Chief among the books examining the psychological and physical effects of the depression on the lives of the prairie people is Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House. It deals with the problems, social, economic and psychological, of a minister and his wife in a small Saskatchewan town. Circumstances have dictated Bentley's occupation and the depression prevents him from changing it. It is one for which he is ill suited. He is a moody man, scarred by a damaging childhood which has emphasized a natural tendency toward guilt and insecurity. He has chosen the ministry as an economic haven from a hostile environment — he is an artist by choice — and he feels himself both unworthy of his occupation, and unsuited to it. Thrust into a hypocritical position, he alternates between resentment and despair, and occupies himself during the major part of the novel in his study, where he draws endless representations of small prairie towns, their symbolic false-fronted buildings leaning before the force of a symbolically relentless prairie wind. If the story were his, the depression and drought would be merely one more symbolic force before which he must lean. But the story is rather Mrs. Bentley's. In her there is no leaning with the wind. She stands foursquare against not only the problems of the depression, the drought and dust, the petty small-town society with which she must deal, but also against the intangible, but no less powerful, forces which threaten her marriage.

The depression is something she must live with personally. The meagre salary which is the price of her husband's token independence hardly stretches to cover the necessities of their daily lives. The townspeople are critical of the way she spends this money which they provide, and her attempts to stretch the family budget through mail order purchases meet with local disapproval. Her vegetable garden is cut to ribbons by the dust. Her friendship with the local school teacher -- the only member of the community who is sufficiently well educated to understand her intellectual interests -- is open to misunderstanding because he is a man, and is later complicated by his interest in her as a woman.

Mrs. Bentley solves her problems, not by changing or strengthening her husband or herself,or by reaching any sort of compromise with life; she manages to rescue them from their situation by overcoming the economic factors which have imprisoned them. Once removed from a situation where he must continually pretend to be what he is not, Bentley, we are led to believe, will be freed from his frustrations and will once more be able to function positively. The acceptance of his illegitimate child into the family will, it is suggested, further fulfil his psychological needs. His wife accomplishes her purpose by establishing her husband in a book store in the city, where he can presumably make a living in a more congenial atmosphere and without hypocrisy. We might, business conditions being what they were, question the possibility of economic success for this venture if it were not that Ross puts little emphasis on it; it is merely produced as an obvious means of escape once Mrs. Bentley has managed to save the capital necessary for establishing the business. Implicit, perhaps, is the suggestion that the economic situation is improving, so that the improvement in Bentley's circumstances is accepted as part of a general trend. The novel "ends in a springtime of qualified hope. . . . The journey from emptiness and pain to a somewhat more humane society is beginning, but there is no suggestion that the goal is at hand."[167]

The Bentleys are believable characters, with strengths and weaknesses which are their own, but in their reaction to the depression and its attendant problems they are not singular. Bentley himself may have a psychological problem which results from his character and background, but it was typical of the depression that the man of the family, unable to earn a living in his chosen work, was forced into a job unsuited to him or into unemployment, with resulting psychological problems.[168] It was typical also that the woman contrived to operate a household with a constantly dwindling income, and that she did what she could to support her husband, to understand and alleviate his frustrations, to mitigate the inevitable effects of the depression, just as she wiped up the inevitable dust which accumulated on her furniture.

The characters in Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind also live with the depression. Here we find the reminder that, while crops were poor during the thirties, the seasons came and went and brought with them the routine farm activities, with the result that the farmer, while he may have been no better off financially than his unemployed city counterpart, nevertheless had the psychological benefits of work to be done and responsibilities to be met.

> Although two years of wind had piled the black dust even higher against the fences and farm buildings, and the yellow-stubbled fields were thinly stooked with the meager stooks of lean times, the fall of 1931 still brought the excitement of harvest with it. The baize-green of young wheat no longer spread over the flat expanse of prairie; the incessant winds rolled waves no longer through the darker green of June growth. For several weeks men had been busy in the fields, following the binders, stooping to pick up the sheaves and pile them into the stooks that thimbled the land.
>
> It was an urgent time of the year for the town, whose livelihood depended upon the prairie. Down the streets on both sides of the river, tractors hauled threshing machines with feeders turned back upon themselves, linked to cook-cars and followed in turn by the wheeled half-cylinders of water wagons. High spreading grain wagons passed through on grinding wheels; long caterpillars of grain freights often blocked First Street with their slow passage for minutes at a time. . . .
>
> The crop was poor and the wheat would bring only twenty-five cents a bushel. It cost thirty cents to grow, but it must be harvested.[169]

This, of course, was in the early part of the depression. Later the scene changes.

> Fall brought another crop failure to the district; the land was dotted now with empty farmhouses, their blank windows staring out over the spreading prairie, their walls piled high with rippled banks of black dust; farmers and their families moved westward and northward to Alberta and the Peace River country. . . . The town showed the depression; houses needed paint; cars on First Street Saturday evenings were older models; plate-glass windows were empty where businesses had left. The MacDougall Implement Company was the only one of three implement firms remaining. The Sash and Door Factory closed down; Blaine's General Store failed. 170

Ethel Chapman's The Homesteaders includes a description of the same scene. It opens with the dusty prairies of southern Saskatchewan, as the heroine sees them from the window of the small town newspaper office where she works.

> The prairie grew browner and browner as the dry earth waited for rain, and the town became quieter as summer wore on; except for the men who gathered in little groups at the street corners or moved slowly up and down, self-consciously covering the same route several times a day. . . . Most of them were young. . . . Some . . . had come to the West a few years ago . . . because it was a youth's country. Its growing cities and waiting farm land needed young men and women. Now the closed factories, its locked grain elevators, worst of all in this part of Southern Saskatchewan its drought-ridden prairie, frankly said, "We have no need of men." 171

Something of the emptiness and frustration of prairie life under drought conditions creeps into Anne Marriott's poetic picture of the prairies:

PRAIRIE

The restless, never-sated pagan wind
Shakes its grey bones across the hungry soil,
Mile after mile -- grey mile, green mile --
The empty stubble left from last year's toil,
Summer fallow and few threads of wheat,
Old paintless shanty, cows, a gaunt-ribbed
    hound . . .
The tinny-brilliant circle of the sky
Like a cookie-cutter slices out a round
Of dusty bareness, centred by a man
Who plods, bent-necked, in tattered overalls;
A dirty-coloured cloud crawls round the west.
(In the next town they're having thunder-squalls.)
The old wild greedy wind whirls out the oats,
(No crop this year, not even winter's feed)
While over, over, up and down and over,
Bounces the tumbleweed. 172

When, occasionally, the rain did come to the prairies, prosperity did not necessarily follow. Sometimes the timing was wrong, and the rain added to the farmer's frustration.

> The rain had stopped, and the air had the clear coolness that belongs to it after rain. Over the prairie, shallow sloughs were filled to their edges; the thirsty earth had drunk up the water and left much of it to lie in clear puddles between the hummocks; summer fallow fields were welters of gumbo mud; clear drops beaded the foxtail, wild oats, and buckbrush; they sparkled diamondlike from the lupine that spread purple shadow over the prairie; they gleamed from Sean O'Connal's wheat, brown and wilted, five miles south of the town. Sean, with his weathered hat sodden and his fierce red mustaches dripping, stared down at the crop soaked with moisture that had come too late to do it any good.
>
> "Goddam them!" he cried. "Goddam their souls as green and hard as God's little green apples! Goddam their goddam souls!" 173

Sometimes the rain itself, going to the other extreme, damaged the crop.

> This year the crops were heavy in Pine Creek, too. Neil had heard from Johnny Watson, to whom he had rented the farm two years

> ago at a flat rate of five hundred dollars a year. But it was clear from what Johnny said that there would be no payment this fall: "I figure the wheat won't grade better than three, maybe three tough, because we've had an awful lot of rain this fall. That means I'll get about thirty cents a bushel. When you take off cost of threshing, seed, twine, taxes and things like that, I guess I'll go in the hole about ten cents a bushel. We had another baby in the spring and what with one thing and another the going is pretty tough right now. Of course, things will pick up pretty soon and I'll pay you six percent on your money. But in the meantime . . . "
>
> Tough, all right. And there were thousands like Johnny all over the West. [174]

As the depression deepened over the prairies, the suffering of these thousands increased, and was itself a source of suffering to those who witnessed it. Kroetsch's Dr. Murdoch is one of these. Helen tells Johnnie, "He can't sleep at night -- people starving, people without jobs. People sick who won't come in because they can't pay. People ashamed to ask for charity."[175] Johnnie Backstrom suffers with them too, even though he himself is scarcely more fortunate. Listening to the radio in his undertaking parlour, after his attempt to boost the proceeds of the walleyed farmer's auction sale has ended in ludicrous failure, he rebels against Applecart's unctious "Remember that promise. Do as I ask you. And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain --"

> I struck that old Atwater-Kent a blow that would have brained an ox. Ordinarily I don't resort to violence. But I smashed that radio with one blow.

> By that time it was pitch dark. I couldn't see my own hands. It was too dark even to feel. I just sat down in the middle of the floor right where I was; I spoke to that deafening silence.
>
> "And the kids with hungry bellies?" I said. "Those women today who should be nubile when instead they're skin and bones? Those people lining up at 6 A.M. for rotten apples and dried cod? Those people fired and laid off? Those people put out of their homes, sleeping in ditches?"
>
> And I stopped and listened.
>
> That's when I heard myself crying.[176]

In spite of the suffering and the poverty, life on the prairies was not always dismal. As troubles multiplied, escape from them became more important, and for most of the prairie dwellers the frequent social gatherings provided a welcome interval of enjoyment. Music and good food were the common ingredients, whatever the other characteristics of the particular occasion. Anne Marriott describes the country school dance:

> The small uneven schoolhouse floor
> Scraped under big work-boots
> Cleaned for the evening's fun,
> Gasoline lamps whistled.
> One Hungarian boy
> Snapped at a shrill guitar,
> A Swede from out north of town
> Squeezed an accordion dry,
> And a Scotchwoman from Ontario
> Made the piano dance
> In time to "The Mocking-Bird"
> And "When I grow too Old to Dream,"
> Only taking time off
> To swing in a square dance,
> Between ten and half-past three.[177]

Johnnie Backstrom guzzles potato salad at the farm sale, and marvels at the quantities of food he finds at the rodeo when he stops to chat with the ladies at the C.W.L. booth.

> They were a pleasure to behold. Especially with every fresh bright plank of their make-shift counter simply buried in fresh pies, every pie representing a personal sacrifice. It was a miracle how those women could spare the butter and eggs.

There is food, and surprising good cheer at the work bee which Ethel Chapman describes:

> And how amazingly cheerful they all were! There had been, as the prairie farmer puts it, 'no crop' that year, nor for several years before. They were worried over problems of feed to carry their stock through the winter, over bills that must be paid and the necessities of existence for themselves and their families; but when the women put the steaming supper on the table, and the men came in, and they all sat down together there was laughter and wit and repartee. The stock of chairs and dishes was low for such a crowd. Someone would have to sit on an upturned nail keg, someone would have to use a bowl for a tea cup; but there these things bothered them not at all, nor embarrassed them before the visitor. It seemed that whoever came among them was made one of them. 178

Vera Lysenko's farmers, in Westerly Wild, eat well when they gather socially also, but along with the food they bring their woes, bewailing them endlessly against the background of the dance music. Her farmers gather, it appears, to share their troubles rather than to forget them.

To those who remained on the prairies, in hopes that next year would bring better conditions, came glowing accounts of the north country from friends and neighbours who had left. These were received with mixed emotions.

> "You should see our beautiful Peace River plateau," wrote Mrs. Goodman. "The grass is green, about a foot high, there are flowers,

> trees, luxuriant crops, wood for fuel, game for meat, wild berries and good water. I have never seen an Eskimo nor a muskox, nor do we dress in skins and eat pemmican. Our garden is like a fairyland of flowers, and we have a dam where the children swim. There are sweet peas, hollyhocks seven feet tall, vegetable marrow, mallows, cosmos, stocks, daisies, Russian pumpkins, pinks, raspberries, poppies, onions and asparagus. We have no wind or dust storms, no grasshoppers, no weeds."

Peace River Country beautiful and infinitely desirable; the promised land. But it holds no promise for the women left behind in Westerly Wild. Once again they are launched into a recital of their woes -- an orgy of self pity. This is characteristic of the book.

> At this point, Mrs. Olafson stopped, to allow the women a chance to assimilate the information. Mrs. Solberg, thinking of how the sand had destroyed her lilacs that spring, and of what had happened the previous year to her garden was especially bitter. . . .[179]

For others as well, the stories from the north recreate the vision of the promised land. McCourt takes a practical look at the situation, but the dream comes through shining and clear. Johnny's tales of the north, even though they are second-hand, kindle Neil's interest.

> He was quiet for a moment, then went on with kindling enthusiasm. "They say it's a great country, Neil. Land's dirt cheap -- even some good homesteads left. And lots of rain. Ain't been a crop failure since the country's been opened up."
>
> "What about frost?"
>
> "And that's a funny thing, Neil -- there's less danger of frost way up there than down here, three hundred miles south. Reason is the days are longer up there in summer and you get more hours of sunshine. I was talkin' to a man in Riverview last week, a traveller, just come down from there. Said the crops

> were two weeks ahead of ours and good for thirty to the acre all through the block." . . .
>
> "I'm figgerin' on pullin' out myself and headin' up there. Right after harvest. Way I figger it, I can't be any worse off. And there's a chance to make a killin' up there. The land around here's gettin' wore out. Too much wheat year after year, too many weeds. Up there a man has a chance to start over with land that's rich and clean and plumb full of minerals." 180

The glowing stories of the north country, added to the general desolation of the country around him and the sight of others abandoning the country, add to Neil's determination to leave.

> Johnny got out and cranked furiously. The engine started with a spluttering roar and he hopped back in beside Neil. "One thing," he said, "you don't have to worry none about sweatin' on a day like this. Water dries up before she even gets outside."
>
> "Looks as if we'll be lucky to save seed," said Neil. "Every thing's burning up. Unless we get rain soon -- "
>
> "We'll get it, all right," said Johnny. "Heat like this is bound to bring up a thunderstorm. Give us a soaker within a week and We'll get twenty bushel off summer-fallow and an average of mebbe ten all round. Course, if we don't -- "
>
> Neil looked up at the blue sky. "No sign of rain," he said. "Anyway, my crop's pretty well gone already."
>
> "Tough goin', Neil," said Johnny diffidently. "You haven't had much luck since you come back -- even in the good years. Mebbe I can pay you somethin' on what I owe you if it rains. But you know how it is with five kids and the wife needin' an operation."
>
> "I know," said Neil shortly. He turned out to pass a hayrack piled high with household goods and drawn by a team of lean bay horses. A man and woman were sitting on top of the load. Both were well past middle age. The man lifted his hand in response to Johnny's salute, but the woman sat staring straight ahead along the dusty road.

> "Headin' for the Peace," said Johnny. "Yesterday I counted twelve outfits -- old cars, trucks, two hayracks and a wagon-load. There was five kids on the wagon and they was leadin' a couple of cows so skinny you could see clear through them. All from the dust bowl. They figger they got nothin' to lose."

At home Neil finds the situation equally depressing.

> The room was shabby, pathetically so. The woodwork needed re-doing, the floor-boards which Moira had painted a bright green where the linoleum had worn off were splintered and rotten, and there were great cracks in the wall plaster which successive layers of calsomine were unable to conceal. And everywhere the dust lay in a thick grey film -- dust that filtered in under the windows in spite of the wet cloths that Moira had laid along the sills, under the door, seemingly out the very walls themselves. And it would always be like this -- always the unrelenting struggle against an environment that was either too hot or too cold, or dusty ~~or~~ muddy, but never equable, never kindly. Johnny Watson was right; it was time to be on the move. Neil sat there, leafing through the pages of the farm journal, but with unseeing eyes. His imagination had leapt over three hundred miles of prairie and parkland to the cool banks of the smooth-flowing Peace, so unlike the turbulent, yellow Saskatchewan, where his acres stretched through miles of woodland and pasture and wheat field, and where his green and white colonial house, standing on a rising point of ground, commanded a magnificent sweep of water stretching into remote, purple distances. Yes, Johnny was right. The promised land lay north. And Neil was going! 181

The faith in the future which the migrants showed, in their eager acceptance of the promises of the north country, is only another manifestation of the next-year philosophy which is typical of the prairies. Whether they stayed or whether they left, the prairie farmers needed only a glimpse of the possibility of better things to renew their faith.

Even in the hearts of the farmers waiting in line for their share from Kroetsch's relief car, the next-year philosophy refuses to die.

> To make matters absolutely unbearable, a swanky new Chevrolet had to pull up to the railway depot. Murdock's new Chevrolet. . . . That new Chevrolet parked in the middle of the driveway, green and hardly a speck of dust on it, the chrome shining, sparkling in the sunshine; it brought a kind of hush over that crowd as if they were suddenly in church. . . . The seats of that car were a deep blue-green. . . .
>
> Those people should have expressed their indignation. Instead, they started speculating. One good crop, this fellow said. One decent harvest, somebody answered. Just let me land one forty-bushel crop by Jesus, somebody practically cried aloud. Pretty soon the whole place was humming. . . . People got out of line to finger the pieces of new machinery. Hopes rose. I believe I could have made my fortune right there, selling raincoats.[182]

Rain or no rain, life, and an interest in swanky new Chevrolets with green upholstery, continues. Living cannot be postponed until economic conditions are favorable.

Sinclair Ross uses this as a theme for his short story "Not by Rain Alone." A young farmer, embittered because it appears that his crop will once again fail, and his plans for marriage be set back another year, discovers that in the eyes of the girl he hopes to marry the crop is of secondary importance.

> "If only this once it would rain," he said as a distant peal of thunder reached them. "It's hard to believe it can miss us every time."
>
> She kept her eyes across the field. "It won't, Will -- not every time. I've been looking -- and your wheat's not gone yet, anyway."

> "I've been waiting for it such a long time." He tried now to justify his despondency, giving a little hitch to his shoulders. "That's all that's wrong with me to-day. I've been thinking that maybe this year the crop would make things different --."
>
> She nodded. "I get tired waiting, too."
>
> He glanced at her quickly; she pressed a little on his arm.
>
> "Tired seeing you once or twice a week, thinking about you coming in from the field and your meals not ready --."
>
> "You mean, then, that if it rains to-night --?"
>
> She turned her head a little, looked across the field again. "I mean, Will, that even if it doesn't rain --." 183

VII

When the rain does finally return to the prairies, the latent optimism reasserts itself everywhere. Even Vera Lysenko's people, who have given no evidence of either hope or faith, react in typical prairie fashion.

> Over the desert-like plains of Southern Saskatchewan a drenching downpour of spring rain had fallen. Even in the southwest, the grain fields which the previous summer had been burned brown by the scorching sun, now lay soaking under close to an inch and a half of water. The prairie, which had defied the death of the drought, now began to revive under the immense life-giving power of the rain. Would the earth be permitted to produce this year, would the wind and drought finally relax their grip on the land? There was so much time to make up for, so many years of deprivation to retrieve.
>
> In the fields, the farmers stood with faces uplifted to the warm, plump clouds hovering over them, so close it seemed you could touch them, and as the fresh wind blew on their cheeks, bringing portent of more rain, they

> foresaw at last the time, not too far off now, when they would see grain standing high in their fields once more. . . .
>
> The farm women breathed the cleansed, cool air, listened to the sibilant hiss of the rain, and got out packets of flower and vegetable seeds for their gardens. . . . In town, Julie met Mrs. Florence Forsythe, but a changed Mrs. Forsythe, with a new moisture in her appearance, and a manner from which the tension had at last been loosed.
>
> "Oh, it's heavenly," she sighed, lifting her face to the drizzle. "Like the soft moist air of the old country. I never thought I'd feel it again."
>
> "Still longing for the old country?" asked Julie.
>
> "Maybe this country can be wonderful too," said she. "Do you know what I'm planning to do this year?"
>
> "What?" asked a curious Julie.
>
> "I'm going to have the best flower garden in Saskatchewan." 184

The alchemy of the rain, the downpour which finally ended the drought, caught the imagination of many depression writers. It was more than a rain. It was a dream come true, a promise fulfilled, a faith justified, an ordeal ended. Kroetsch describes it as well as anyone; not only the rain itself, but its effect on the people, the easing of the tension, the sense of blessing.

> I looked back just once and the sky in the west was positively black. As if a great fist had closed the sun's eye. As if a range of mountains had broken loose and was galloping straight at me. The whole west was one great galloping cloud of smothering dust. I reached to turn on the lights.
>
> And then the shiver turned to elation. Because I saw the windshield again. A drop of rain had hit the windshield. A drop of genuine water. Even while I was watching, right before my eyes, a second drop hit.
>
> My bowels melted. That's when I first realized: I had forgotten what a rain cloud looks like. In a flash I remembered. That

> hint of purple behind all the blackness. You understand -- earlier I had believed it would rain. While all the time I suspected that every cloud is made of dust. Now I knew it would rain. There's a terrible difference.
>
> All of a sudden I wasn't just driving down that gravel washboard out toward Coulee Hill; I was floating. There'd be a harvest after all. . . . There'd be fat golden kernels under those barley beards. Stooks in the fields. There'd be wheat in the granaries and feed in the feedbox and a new washing machine on the back porch and beer in the cellar and water in the wells and the jingle of coins throughout the land. . . .
>
> Those old poplars would be stiff and straight, busting with life again. The ditches would be full of muskrats and bulrushes, mallards and pintails and thousands of croaking frogs. Little kids would have new clothes for school in the fall. Taxes would be paid. They'd be selling gas again, in the filling stations. Fill her up please. . . . I just knew it. Let's take the kids to a movie, Ma, and a tiger for Johnnie Backstrom. 185

The physical aspects of the storm, when it comes, are just as vivid.

> It came down by the barrelful. The air we breathed was suffocating, it was so full of water. You needed gills. You could drown standing up on a raft. And to make matters worse, night was falling. By the time we were ready to leave the Gunns the mud was ankle-deep in the middle of the yard. That damned old hearse could no more budge than fly. We got stuck in Gunn's Lane before we ever got out to the dirt road. It was no use. We had to wait for Gunn to harness and hook up a team and lend us a wagon. . . .
>
> We drove through the rain and darkness, Doc and I, both of us together under a binder canvas sitting up there on that spring board seat. . . . I listened to the rain; it was nearly pitch dark, with the rain falling not in sheets now, but steady. The three-day kind of rain. It might go on for a full week, you can always guess. It was coming almost straight down, heavy and steady, soaking the earth. Everything was mud or water. Everything. The whole world was mud or water. 186

The physical description, as always with Kroetsch, is the background against which the human tragi-comedy takes place.

> After a while. . . I noticed a light up ahead. . . . It turned out to be a lantern. There it was, almost pitch black out, and when we came to drive past a farm, a man and wife were out at the end of their lane, waiting.
>
> You could see they'd been there quite a while. The woman's scarf, over her head, was soaked through. The man's big woolen jacket was hanging heavy with rain. They were there, the two of them, a couple, the man holding the lantern, the woman holding something else under a towel. . . . They'd heard we were out on a night like this. They listened, farmers take that liberty during an emergency, and they were waiting for us with a pot of hot coffee and sandwiches. . . . I never tasted a better cup of coffee, never in my whole life. I wanted to say so to those two people standing there by the wagon wheel. I wolfed down a couple or three sandwiches, intending to express my thanks.
>
> But an embarrassing thing happened. I thought they'd come out because of the old doctor. Everybody knew him. But when I handed down the empty cups and the wet plate from the wagon, that woman -- she reached up and touched my hand. I could hardly believe it. My hands which have done so many wicked things. . . .
>
> "We want to thank you," she said. "We'll be in there tomorrow, somehow, if we have to swim." 187

As the journey progresses it becomes apparent to Johnnie that he has won his election, his indemnity. The novel ends, as it began, with a political meeting -- a meeting where the voters waited past midnight, while it rained, to cheer him. The whole situation is beautifully ironic. The rain has brought him victory; it is Helen who brings him the news.

> "They're still there," she said. "Everybody is still there. . . . Everything in town is empty except the hall. Even the beer parlor. They're waiting. . . . It had begun to rain," said Helen. "It was the rain."
>
> She was standing there, not a yard away. Little H.P. She was the garden, the forest of my soul; a forest tangled and scented. A forest wild. She was the turf and torment of my raucous love. My own wife, that bundle of consistencies, is all straight hair at one end, a twist or two at the other. H.P. was the paradox of my dreams.
>
> But instead of bringing relief, her remark is what plunged me into despair. Don't you see? You've got to understand. That's why I yielded to despair. For a moment I really did, I gave up completely. Because of her remark -- it was a prophecy of all to come. It was the alibi the world would use to cudgel me. If I took victory now, the world would mock me with: who couldn't win? You've got to see, I was utterly defeated -- by her quietly saying, it was the rain. Because I could have gone straight into Coulee Hill bareheaded and bare-knuckled and I could have whipped old Murdoch fair and square: *I could have done it without the rain*. 188

So Johnnie Backstrom, appropriately, is defeated by the thing that should have brought him victory, and the tragicomic atmosphere of the book is carried through to the last page.

The Drylanders, too, ends with the coming of the rain. The welcome sound of running water fills our ears, as we watch the rain washing over the roofs of the farm buildings, overflowing the eaves troughs, gushing from the spouts. Listening, watching, Elizabeth recognizes that the upswing, the new cycle, is beginning, and says to herself, "Dan, why can't you be here now? We're starting again." The cycle was, indeed, beginning again, and prairie dwellers rejoiced to see their barren fields return to productivity.

RESURRECTION

It's good to see the grain grow here again,
After the dust-years and the drought. Ten years
Ago, who would have thought it possible?
Nature has withstood, despite our fears,
Her own fierce ravages. Who can explain
Her ways or her resources, or the skill
Of man, surviving where survival seemed
A nightmare to be shunned? Ten years ago
The dust-blown, windswept fields lay desolate,
Ribbed into dusty ridges, piled like snow
Against and over fences, while life screamed
Her death-song on the wind. Only the great
Round balls of Russian thistle, snapped off short
Above the earth, scudded in aimless surge
Of dun-brown life in all this treeless waste.
Even the barns and buildings had no urge
To live. Bare and unpainted, undergirt
By a bleak, lost forlornness, widely-spaced
And sterile-seeming as the earth, they stood
Like ghostly sepulchres symbols of death,
More dead than death itself, yet housing life.
Men lived here, somehow, without hope or faith,
Yet lived. And the gaunt livestock lived, what could
Live, when their mates had gone. Here, nature's strife
With nature did its worst.
. . . .
Yet life smiles here again with the old charm.
The grain grows ripe and ready for the stock.
Nature has, somehow, held it all in trust.
The headed wheat bestrides the fertile plain:
It's good to see the grain grow here again.
-- Thomas Saunders 189

CHAPTER IV

THE DEPRESSION IN RETROSPECT

What was the aftermath of the depression for prairie people, and how does it look in retrospect? To a certain extent we have already supplied an answer to this question, since some of the literature examined has been the product of memory, written and published long after the experience. But there is a body of literature which deliberately uses the retrospective approach, and it is interesting to compare this with the literature which was produced directly out of the experience of the depression. Sinclair Ross, for instance, or W. O. Mitchell, writing during the thirties or immediately afterwards, could not see the depression in the same light as Kroetsch and Boyle, writing in the sixties. The two views must be different, though one may be as revealing as the other. What the later books gain in perspective they lose in immediacy.

The contrast is especially apparent when we find the same author writing from the two different points of view. A. F. Menzies, in 1937, writing of the experiences of those who had escaped from the prairies to "A Little Place on the Coast," spoke in terms of disappointment and failure. In spite of the humorously ironic tone of the piece, it suggests a future as bleak as the present. When I asked him to look back at the depression, he wrote the following in 1970.

> You ask for anecdotes of the depression, and in Mark Twain's words "the very opulence of the supply is an embarrassment." Most of the anecdotes which come to my mind have to do with the life of a country printer and editor of a small town weekly.
>
> Nobody had any money, so we had to resort to barter. In exchange for the paper we took anything of value -- firewood, meat, milk, vegetables of all kinds, even on one occasion a large pot of baked beans. Money was so scarce that once we took in a nickel for a copy of the paper and the next money we took in was a week later when the same man came back with another nickel.
>
> A friend of ours who ran a paper in Kelvington was offered 52 gallons of buttermilk -- one gallon per week for a year -- for a year's subscription to his paper. He said, editorially: "We like buttermilk well enough, that is, buttermilk in reason. But buttermilk by the gallon, buttermilk by the barrel? . . . But stay! Where there is so much buttermilk there must be some butter. How about bringing us some butter? Not so, said the farmer. We can SELL the butter."
>
> How does one feed a wife and four children in conditions like these? Well, partly by using one's wits, and believe me, the depression sharpened the wits. One could smell a deal a mile away if it offered even a trifle of profit. I once worked out a deal which resulted in $250 worth of business being done, without a cent of cash changing hands. By the terms of this deal our milkman got $50 worth of seed oats; the farmer with the oats got a tax receipt for $50; the school district got credit from the tax collector for $50 in commissions (not all earned on this one collection); the tax collector got credit from us for $50 on his printing bill, and we got $50 worth of milk delivered to our door.
>
> During the depression years we were involved in quite a few deals of this kind. In one instance we traded off an old car which we couldn't afford to operate, and after a three-or-four sided deal it came back to us in the form of 10,000 feet of good lumber, which we used as

> the nucleus of a combined shop and residence.
>
> Hudson Bay Junction was a "divisional point" on the C.N.R. That is to say the C.N.R. had a roundhouse there and burned considerable coal. As there were several billion cords of good firewood in the area, somebody thought of propositioning the C.N.R. to change over to wood in their roundhouse boilers. They finally agreed to do this provided the Village handled the accounts of all the individual homesteaders, and they (the C.N.R.) would pay the account once a month, to the Village. Some sort of interim receipt had to be given when a man brought in a load of wood, and I was given the task of wording this "scrip" so that the Village would not get into trouble. I worded it as follows:
>
> > THE VILLAGE OF HUDSON BAY JUNCTION acknowledges an indebtedness to the bearer, of One Dollar -- Two Dollars -- Five Dollars (or whatever). Present this form to the Village Secretary at the end of the month.
>
> The first day the scrip hit the street the Royal Bank launched a suit against the village for issuing money. But the court threw it out without permitting it to come to trial, because the paper only "acknowledged a debt" and did not "promise to pay."
>
> Actually this turned out to be a great blessing to the community, and resulted in the purchase of several thousand dollars worth of groceries each month which otherwise would have remained on the shelves. The merchants gladly accepted the scrip as cash, and once a month, when the C.N.R. cheque came in, the secretary "paid off" the stores, and incidentally, collected a large amount of tax arrears which could not otherwise have been paid. The system was still working well when we left H.B.J., and I believe for several years afterwards.[1]

The difference in attitude between the two pieces is a subtle one. Both reflect the same mildly satiric view of life, the same good humor, the same respect for humanity. The difference is mainly one of tone. Behind the sympathetic humor of the earlier piece lurks an atmosphere of uncertainty amounting almost to apprehension; there is no apparent solution available for a problem which urgently requires solving. Thirty years later the uncertainty is gone. The ordeal is over, and the people concerned have acquitted themselves well, using ingenuity and their scanty resources to good advantage. The experience may be remembered with satisfaction. But with the easing of the tension, the depth of feeling which gave the earlier piece much of its literary value has also disappeared.

The current revival of interest in the depression has brought to light much buried history, recorded and unrecorded. Depression reminiscences become the subject of light verse, poetry, essays, or creep into literature devoted to other subjects. Woven into the continuity of history or biography or autobiography, the thirties receive special attention as a period apart, with a character and an individuality of its own. Patricia Armstrong, in her poem "This Land," traces the historical progression of the prairies, beginning with the breaking of the sod and moving through the period of development and prosperity to the depression years.

> This is a land
> That saw the cruel drought of the Thirties
> with grasshoppers, dust storms, depression:
> What then of the hope and the dream?
> The long freights still rolled through the
> prairie on a straight rail from Weyburn
> to Moose Jaw --
> But the threshing crews . . .
> Where were the transients
> Who had flocked to the reaping from cities and
> blistered their palms in the grainfields?
> Gone forever, it seemed, from the wheatland.
> Black dirt clouds rolled over the prairie,
> sifting and sweeping before them
> Confidence, pride, independence;

And life savings
Dwindled
Away.
There came from the East then relief cars of
generous food for the stricken --
And who can say why the accepting made the
farmer feel shamed and degraded?
Embittered, bewildered, and cornered,
Like a staked bear dog-baited and baffled,
He faced mortgager,
Banker,
Collector for machines that had nothing
to reap.
Their smiles of enticement now sheared off
(Like green shoots cut away by the dust winds)
They clamored for payment; they told him
The ruin was of his own making;
He must shoulder the blame all alone.[2]

A former Torchbearer, Robert Collins, gives evidence of the unassailable optimism of childhood in his account of his boyhood in Saskatchewan during the depression. The extract is from a Readers' Digest article, "My Saskatchewan Boyhood."

> There were cruel days, too. Days when my father fell on the couch, too exhausted to wipe the black dust-mask from his face after twelve hours of prying a living from dry soil. Days when clouds of grasshoppers dimmed the sun, then settled to strip every green stalk. Days when a white fury of hail wiped out a year's hopes in ten minutes. A day when a sandstorm turned a morning into night, and the school closed at noon. Yet even on that awful day, walking home through a gray fog of topsoil, my brother and I blithely picked crocuses. It was always that way. Nothing seemed to defeat us for long.[3]

The same contrast between the attitude of child and adult is the theme of the following

THE LESSON

In the days of childhood,
cracks in the wall
were rivers

and their tributaries --
Geography that I taught to dolls.
But to my parents
in the depression years,
they were adversities.

Now the perfection
of my home
shatters my nerves.

-- Dorothy Cameron Smith[4]

The long-term effect of the depression on character, suggested here, is a basic theme of one book, Harry Boyle's The Great Canadian Novel. Shane Donavon is a product of a depression childhood in a small Saskatchewan town. Now a successful advertising man, he has once more run away from home -- we have seen earlier how he became a transient at the age of eleven or twelve -- this time from a wife and family who do not understand his need to write. Memories of past experiences interrupt the flow of the current events, and as the book progresses the reader becomes increasingly aware of the permeating influence of his early depression experiences. It becomes apparent that his "depression thinking" is as much responsible for his alienation from his family as his need to write.

> "Mona, why do you drive so far away to buy stuff when there's a perfectly good store just three blocks away -- and they deliver?"
>
> Mona was shocked.
>
> "But they're more expensive."
>
> Shane was angry.
>
> "Look, when I was a kid the only store that would sell us groceries -- and on tick -- was a little fellow. Bloody chain had to have cash for everything. Oh, yes, they'd honour relief vouchers, but never give you a loaf of bread the day before, when you were starving. Not likely, and the damned chain finally put the little fellow, Thomson, out of business."

> He was nearly shouting. Mona, Bill and Rita were staring at him in a form of shock.
> "Oh, Dad, that's ancient history."
> The explanations were useless. It shocked him to be yanked back in his subconscious to the childhood that he rejected. 5

But he is yanked back repeatedly, and eventually comes to realize, himself, that he will never escape the effects of his early experiences.

> Like the people who call themselves "depression casualties," Shane Donovan felt the scars. The depression was a conspiracy against him. While he was still in Nonsuch, he had a vague impression that his parents were to blame. It never occurred to him that his parents were the real depression victims. 6

His parents were not the only victims. Shane suffers too. He is the product of a home where the father pretends to despise education because it was never within his reach, and resents his own failure to provide for his family. The mother, more understanding, is dominated by her husband. Shane, sensitive and alive to the world of books and creativity, is warped by more than the depression. There is much in the past that he remembers which would explain his present psychological problems, problems that he drowns, whenever possible, in alcohol. But basic, behind them all, is the experience of his early years.

> "It's hard to get over that bloody prairie and no money and your parents drying up like the tumbleweed and maybe rolling off. This awful wanting enough behind you, so you won't end up that way and then being too gutless to try to break free and do what you want to do." 7

In spite of its preoccupation with the past, Boyle's novel is contemporary in theme. Shane, associated in business with Americans and American enterprises, is belligerently Canadian, and resents the placid assumption of American superiority, and the intrusion into Canadian life of American manners and American ideals. Boyle treats the depression as an element which has helped to create Canadian character and it, too, is important for its effect on contemporary life.

Boyle is the only novelist who takes the frankly reminiscent point of view. There is, however, a considerable body of non-fiction, published and unpublished, which looks back at the depression and evaluates it in the light of subsequent experience. It consists of autobiographies, light histories, interviews and unpublished letters, mainly material which has only recently become available.

Moving from novel to autobiography we would expect to move from fiction to fact. Probably we do, though in one or two instances there may be room for doubt. Laugh Baby Laugh, by Ann Henry, is presumably non-fiction, the story of the author's experiences during the depression in Winnipeg. Certainly she intends the suffering clown reference implicit in her title; there are passages throughout the book which make it apparent that she is aware of the tragi-comedy of her story. But the reader finds himself disturbed, in his relationship with the book, by the very nature of the material. Fact it must be, not only because she names names and places and dates, but because not even the writer of the wildest fiction would expect the reader to accept a series of events so improbable. The catalog of her calamities is, in itself, appalling. They begin when, at the age of four, she and her sister are forced to hide, scarcely breathing, while a demented mother feels her way along the wall searching for them, clutching a bread knife "long, and shiny and sharp." Rescued at the last minute by her father's timely arrival, she watches as her mother, "her face white, her eyes blazing hatred," is taken off to a mental hospital. Her father is one of the Labour Party men involved in the great General Strike of 1919 in Winnipeg, and he is shortly forced into hiding for political reasons, leaving the children with a farm family he had befriended, whom he thinks he can trust. His trust is sadly misplaced. The woman is a sadist, and the teacher at the school to which the girls are sent is little better. Ann, who is under-age and has only been sent to school initially to get rid of her, is soon confined on the farm, neglected, chained, beaten. After two years of physical and psychological torture, the girls are rescued when their father comes to get them. Incredibly, they never tell him what their experience has been, and he never finds out. He dies still believing that they have been well looked after.

The story continues in the same vein. Ann lives in a world of men and women who are cruel, vicious, thoughtless, greedy, drunken, dishonest, incredibly stupid. Only on rare occasions does she encounter a human being.

The tale is an unlikely one, if only because of the sheer weight of her misfortunes. But there are single incidents which raise even more serious doubt. For example, at the age of fifteen, ignoring the fact that she cannot dive, or even swim, Ann takes a job as a high diver in a circus. Her employer, understandably wroth when he learns the situation, takes her out into the middle of a cold lake where, with no instruction, she learns her profession in one desperate afternoon's floundering practice. Having previously dived only from the boat, she returns to the show where she has two dives to make, one from the shoulders of another diver, who is fortunately an expert, and another simultaneously with his head foremost, both from the forty-foot board, into a small tank of water five and a half feet deep. "It was a bit frightening," she reports, and she was "mighty relieved" that she didn't have to dive from the ninety-foot level. This the reader can believe with no trouble.

For the moment it almost seems as though Ann has found human beings, for the people in the circus are kind. But it is only illusion. The "human torch" absconds with all the circus money, the circus folds, and the performers pack and depart, leaving Ann, unpaid, penniless, barefoot and alone, in the midst of the debris. Everything she owns has been stolen, even her clothes. A young girl offers help, but her mother screams, "No dirty carnival girl is coming into this house!" Things are back to normal.

The nemesis pursues everyone who touches Ann. Her sister Edna falls in love with a young man in comfortable circumstances. About to be married, and filled with joyous anticipation, she is sent to the hospital for a rest; she dies from an accidental injection of typhus germs. Her father collapses from the shock, and never fully recovers. Ann herself falls in love with a young man who is "the salt of the earth" and becomes engaged, but he jilts her. She marries Bud, an acquaintance from the circus, who takes to drink and deserts her, leaving her with two small children to care for, weak from recent childbirth, destitute and homeless. Weak she may have been, but in the next chapter we are told that she walks between St. Boniface and Winnipeg, carrying the baby and leading Donnelly, aged about two, by the hand, not once but many times, throughout the whole of a hot July day, with no food and no one to offer a helping hand. She is sent from Children's Aid to Welfare Department, back and forth between the two cities, even to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police where the officer, who is busy, varies the standard "Sorry, there is nothing we can do," that she has been hearing all day. "Get the Hell out!" he yells. She fills out endless forms, endures lectures on the evils of nagging delivered by prim self-righteous welfare workers. Nowhere does she meet a spark of human sympathy until, purely by accident, she falls, almost literally, into the arms of a kindly two-fisted woman who declares the welfare all "bleedin' bawstards," (a judgment with which we readily agree), and takes charge of the situation.

Ann's whole life, during the grim depression period, follows the same pattern. Although it appears that she finally works her way through her difficulties, the reader is left with the feeling, as he closes the book, that peace is only temporary and that any minute now disaster will strike once more.

It is not only the incredible series of events which is disturbing to the reader. There is an undercurrent which requires explanation, but is too elusive to be grasped and examined. Our own experiences tell us that people are not the way they appear in this book. The occasional human being may be unthinking or heartless or stupid enough to refuse help to a destitute woman with an infant in her arms and a two-year-old at her side, but compassion is not as rare as her experiences suggest. We are accustomed to misfortunes which do not come singly, but when they come in droves we are inclined to think that there is more than chance at work. There are suggestions in the book, veiled and indistinct, that Ann recognizes in herself some responsibility for much of her trouble. This comes out most clearly in the epilogue.

> Now that my children are fully-grown adults, the subject of their father rarely, if ever, comes up. When it does, there is no embarrassment, or, so I tell myself, no particular pain. In the past I had told them, wiser than I realized, of his looks and his strength. Even then I think they had begun to understand, with more insight than I then possessed, that their mother was gravely at fault as well. 8

Perhaps her insight is still not good enough, for the story as it comes from her pen, although it suggests that she must surely have been at least partly the author of her own misfortunes, leaves the reader unable to explain just how she was at fault.

The book is troublesome, also, in its claim to a place in depression literature. It is not a book about the depression in the same sense as The Winter Years by James Gray, which we shall discuss later. It is a book about Ann Henry. It is not a book which uses the depression as a setting for a discussion of psychology or philosophy in the same sense as The Words of My Roaring or As For Me and My House. It is, once again, a book about Ann Henry. It seems to describe life in Winnipeg during the depression, and it speaks with the conviction of first-hand experience. It is a bitter condemnation of the inhumanity and ineptitude of the welfare system, and points to weaknesses and injustices which we know existed during the depression, and probably still exist. And yet we accept the condemnation with reservations, for the book leaves us with the feeling that to no one but Ann Henry would the depression in Winnipeg have appeared in quite that way, and that even without the depression she, being Ann Henry, would have found life very little different.

We may forgive Ann Henry a few flights of fancy. Autobiography is, by its very nature, emotional material. The element of romance is less acceptable in what purports to be a historical account of depression conditions in the west. In what has been used as a text in Ontario High Schools, A. B. Hodgetts describes the plight of the prairie farmers -- their unpaid debts, their cost-price dilemma -- and continues,

> Many prairie women dressed themselves and their children in clumsy garments made from old flour sacks or from burlap bags in which binder twine had once been wrapped. Families were forced to sacrifice their telephones, their daily or weekly newspapers, their radios and their cars and thus, through poverty, lost their access to neighbours and to the outside world. Once again, as in the pioneering days before the War, thousands of families dwelt in dreary isolation with 'nothing to keep them company but the moanings of the prairie wind in the dry grass, or in the still cold nights the lugubrious yelp of coyotes to add the last touch to their loneliness and desolation.'

The punctuation suggests that Hodgetts wishes to be relieved of responsibility for the final passage, but he does not acknowledge its source. He quotes, also, a description of a dust storm, possibly from the same pen.

> A farmer who lived through it all has described in the following words what happened, not once but many times, in this 'dust bowl' of Canada: 'The breeze comes on just a little stronger and a few small particles of dried-out soil start to drift gently along the top of the cultivated land. Very soon, with the increasing wind, the whole surface of the field is sifting along, always moving, always gathering fresh momentum. There is nothing spectacular yet. But wait -- away off to the north-west a heavy black cloud is forming between earth and sky. Black, yes, black as night. It sweeps rapidly towards us at forty, fifty, sixty miles an hour. . . . [sic] The air gets colder. The huge black cloud is now only a mile away. A minute, and with a blast like the roar of a thousand lions it is upon us. We are alone in a sightless mass of hurtling soil and stinging sand. We can only stand buffeted by the blows of a

> thousand hammers or drift helpless, choking, blinded. For hours the tortured soil is torn and ravished until the storm ceases. Then we look out on the fields which we have tilled. They are as smooth as if polished by a giant plane. Here and there a few wheat plants, stricken, stand on roots remaining in the hard subsoil. With tomorrow's sun they will probably fade and die. Millions [sic] in rich top soil is gone for ever. [sic] That is the black blizzard, the most appalling thing in nature.'

Hodgett continues:

> The fine grey-brown dust of the drought-stricken areas ground itself into the skin and clothes, sifted through the walls and windows into the home, tainted the food and the flesh of animals and pierced the hearts of many men and women with despair. Not only the wheat crop but also the vegetable gardens shrivelled in the dry heat and thousands of cattle died of starvation and thirst. Families now faced not just loneliness and a drastic fall in living standards but outright starvation. Women who had once worried about their children being cold and miserably clad now struggled to keep them alive on a diet of bread, potatoes and 'gopher stew.' And yet they carried on. Despite the pleading of governments and the urgent warnings of nature, the great majority of wheat farmers in the dust bowl continued to plant their fields always hoping that next year, or the year after, things would be better. Nature and man however did not smile on the West again until the coming of the Second World War raised the price of wheat once more to profitable levels.[9]

There seems to be an obvious error in logic here, for certainly the price of wheat and the black blizzard cannot be viewed as cause and effect, or even considered manifestations of the same tragedy. Hodgett's farmers appear unwilling to change their farming methods, or to accept advice. He either ignores, or is unaware of, the fact that the farmers did not sit idly by and watch their topsoil disappear without looking for a remedy.

The search for this remedy is the subject of James Gray's Men Against the Desert. It was his second book about the depression, and arose from his first, The Winter Years. During his research for the latter, Gray accumulated a good deal of information about the methods which were eventually used in the west to defeat the drought. This was not specifically depression material. It was agricultural and scientific, and yet it comprised a story of human endeavour which was basic to life on the prairies during the thirties. Tales of the bedraggled caravans of defeated farmers deserting a stricken dust bowl were often repeated. Nobody had told the story of the men who elected to stay and fight, with hands and heads, rather than abandon their farms.

This is the story that Gray tells in Men Against the Desert. It is the story of the agricultural scientists who contributed knowledge gained from study and experimentation, of the farmers who added wisdom gained from years of experience, and of the willingness to cooperate and experiment, and the dedicated hard work, which led to eventual success.

> The story of that campaign and the persons involved in it is one of the great Canadian success stories. There is drama in the story, and pathos, and the exhilaration created by victory in spite of seemingly overwhelming odds.[10]

Gray's farmers are not the same breed as those who ignored the "urgent warnings of nature" and the "pleading of governments" -- (just what it was the governments were pleading with them to do is not clear) -- in Hodgett's history. Gray writes of men who evaluated the conditions, accepted advice, fought and won their battle.

Perhaps the story of Rolling Hills, Alberta, is one of the most colorful episodes in the drama. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration -- the government agency largely responsible for the fight to reclaim the western land -- established to its own satisfaction the necessity for creating, from eroded land in the Cypress Hills area, a community pasture. The first step in this project was, of necessity, to relocate the farm families still living in the designated area. There were many concessions offered to the farmers to persuade them to move. They could choose between irrigated or dry land in the Rolling Hills district of Alberta, which they could have for a nominal price, and overvalued prices were offered them for their present land. In addition they were permitted to tear down their buildings and take the lumber with them for rebuilding their homes in the new area, and free transportation was provided for the lumber as well as their other belongings.[11] Thus the technical aspects of land reclamation had to be translated into human terms before the project could get under way.

The Winter Years, which will be discussed in more detail later, shares the same attitude toward the depression. Both are based on factual research and on actual experience, and yet their whole atmosphere and emphasis is uplifting rather than depressing. The emphasis in the fictional literature is on tragedy and defeat; Gray's emphasis is on an attitude which refuses to consider the possibility of defeat. The depression, as he tells its story, is an episode in the history of the west -- an episode which, even for those who were involved in it when it was at its worst, was sure to give way, in time, to a return to the good life. Secure in this belief, you have only to wait. Meanwhile you make the best of what you have. If there is no money for organized entertainment you take long walks, which benefit your health. If there is no hay for the stock you cut the Russian thistle and store it for winter. If there is no coffee, you make a substitute from parched barley. If there is no money for food you go on relief; no new clothes, you patch the old ones; no work, leisure for reading. And always you have the consolation of knowing that you are down through no fault of your own; that your neighbour is no better off than you are; that social activities and enjoyment of life are not dependent on high income.

In analyzing the character and quality of the thirties on the prairies, Gray does not overlook the fact that the drought and depression were not the only problems the farmers had to face. Perhaps even more demoralizing were the plagues of grasshoppers, which swept into those areas lucky enough to receive rain and destroyed what promised to be a good crop in a matter of hours. Nor did the hail, which brought devastation even more sudden and just as unpredictably, forsake the prairie in its time of trouble. It, too, was more likely to descend without warning on those areas where growing conditions were good. And to these problems, which were perennial on the prairies whatever the economic situation, was added a new one: rust. Marquis wheat, which had been the mainstay of prairie agriculture since its development, proved woefully susceptible to stem rust, which infested fields where the grain stood heavy and left the wheat stems pitted and brittle and the heads empty of kernels.

Yet in spite of all these problems, faith in the country had apparently not been destroyed when D. B. McRae and R. M. Scott, journalists surveying the country first hand in 1934, made their observations.

> Despite five years of privation and a sadly declining standard of living, McRae and Scott nevertheless discovered there was faith in the country everywhere. From one side of the province to the other they found the people going about the business of being farmers almost as if no disaster had overtaken them. They had worked their summer-fallow for "next year," put up their feed for the winter, hauled in their relief fuel and kept one eye always on the sky for the appearance of the return of the good fall rains. The good crops of 1928 were still remembered and even in the worst of the drouth districts there was a fierce confidence that prosperity would return when the rains came back.
>
> This conviction was one of the things that troubled McRae and Scott. If the governments ever got to a point where they decided to move the people out instead of keeping them on relief, it would be a tough job for anyone to say who should go and who should stay.[12]

The rest of the book demonstrates that when, in fact, it was necessary to move some people out, the farmers were realistic and hard-headed enough to accept whatever decisions necessity dictated, to face the agricultural facts and to stay and fight or retire on the best possible terms, whichever seemed best when all aspects of the situation were considered.

Among those who elected to stay was Israel Hoffer. His story is told in an autobiography, Land of Hope, written by his wife Clara with F. H. Kahan as co-author. It grew from Clara Hoffer's diary into a detailed account of the establishment of a Jewish community at Hoffer, Saskatchewan. The town was named for its founders, Israel Hoffer and his brother Mayer. The bulk of the material deals with pre-depression times, from the original settlement in 1905, but the last two chapters take us through the depression.

Clara Hoffer describes the first onslaught of the dust, this time from inside the house.

> As she studied the sky she thought there was something peculiar about it. What had been a smiling blue expanse had suddenly become a peculiar murky grey. At first she thought it was an unusual formation of clouds. But after a while she realized that it was dust that had been lifted up by the ferocious wind. She became alarmed as a thought occurred to her. Surely it couldn't have been lifted from their own fields? It must have been blown in from other parts south of the country. She tried to peer into the thickening gloom, but visibility was soon gone.
>
> "Ethel!" she called, trying to keep the panic out of her voice. "Light the lamps, please!" . . .
>
> "It would only show more dust, Missus," Ethel answered resignedly, coming in with the dust cloth still in her hand. "Come and see what it did to the furniture."
>
> Clara walked into the living room and ran her finger over the dark piano wood. Already

> there was a quarter of an inch of dust everywhere. With a sinking heart she helped Ethel cover the windows with blankets over the drawn shades and optimistically asked her to go over the furniture again. Her mind was racing. What did this mean? The lamps were lit and what had been a cheerful house had turned into cavernous gloom. What had been a sunny day was a fearful darkness. She went back into the kitchen. There, too, the dust was piling up. The air was thick with it. It choked her, and yet there was no place to escape it. As the wind grew steadily stronger, Clara's fears increased. She was in tears when the family came back from Hoffer. Their hair, their skin, their holiday clothes were covered with fine grey dust.
>
> "I have never seen anything like it," puffed Israel. "I could hardly see where I was going. The windshield was plastered with dust. The ditches are level with the road now." . . .
>
> This was the first of a ceaseless round of dust storms which were to devastate the fields in the southern and central prairies in the "dirty thirties" and earn for this area the name of "the dust bowl." The children were going to have to learn to study and play and grow in it; the farmers and their wives to work in it; and Clara and her family, what it was like to live with a man who never gave up hope. 13

Clara's reaction was probably typical of the reaction to the dust when it first appeared. It was later, in the process of learning to live with the dust, that individual differences became apparent. It was a test of faith and of strength far beyond any that had preceded it, and it was a test that many failed.

Aside from its Jewish orientation, and the individual characters which move through the story, there is nothing here that has not already been discussed. Prices fall, the rain doesn't. The lamp is lit at noon. Some farmers leave the country willingly or yielding to pressure from their wives; others stay, clinging to their faith in the land. Israel and Clara Hoffer, standing at the edge of their field on the evening of one fateful day, remind us of Anne Marriott's courageous couple. They have endured several total crop failures; they have watched while a flight of grasshoppers descended and destroyed their first promising crop in four years. Their cattle have died of septicemia, from eating poor feed. Clara's faith begins to waver, but Israel stands firm.

> "When will you start thinking of yourself and of us, Israel?" she blurted out angrily.
>
> Israel did not look at her. He stood, his hands clasped lightly behind his back in a familiar pose, and looked beyond the horizon. Apparently he had come to some decision. Clara waited impatiently.
>
> "Next year," he said, "things will be different."
>
> By the optimistic glow which lit up his wrinkled forehead, his permanently frowning eyebrows, his turned-up nose and rounded cheeks and square chin, Clara knew he was envisioning the return of rain and crops and prosperity, and that his faith in his vision was unshakeable. 14

In its outline and its material Land of Hope is much like The Drylanders, and like the film, ends with the return of the good times. The depression remains a phenomenon only when viewed out of context. When it is treated as part of the history of the west it falls into perspective as just another aspect of the natural cycle of prairie weather.

> It was midnight when Clara was startled out of her sleep. "Wake up, sleepy head! I am sure you wouldn't want to miss this!"

> "Miss what," she yawned, coming awake with an effort. A strange but beautiful sound was drifting into her consciousness. She sat up. It was the cheerful pitter patter of rain on the roof and on the bedroom window. She jumped out of bed and ran barefoot to the water-dimmed window where Israel stood gazing ecstatically at the blur of heavy downpour. . . .
>
> "This is it," Israel murmured. "It's a general rain, the end of the drought." 15

Appropriately, it is also the end of the book. Here, as in The Drylanders, the cycle is complete.

Ethel Kirk Grayson's Unbind the Sheaves is a "prairie memoir," another autobiographical account of prairie life which places the depression in perspective. Saskatchewan depression Miss Grayson experienced first-hand; life in the dust-bowl area she saw only on one memorable visit. Her approach is unique, in that it is the only purely philosophical discussion of the situation. Her interest is not in the practical problems of everyday life on a dust-ridden farm, or the physical suffering involved, but on the long-term effects on the two children she saw in the particular home that was visited.

Her approach is dictated by the conversation which followed the visit. She was accompanied by her brother, and by a doctor who was a guest.

> Miles out in the country, and in the middle of day, we turned on our lights, so blinding was the thick, dark yellowish atmosphere. And we saw the dust blowing, and the foliage of the trees furry with dust, and phantoms of dust rising on the horizon like menacing pale giantesses, like the idols that rise upon islands in the ocean, of whose origin we are ignorant.

> There were a couple of boys at one place where we called. They spent all their time looking out of the window. The school had been closed, the mother said. The boys sat there looking at a brown waste of land rippled by the wind. They were about seven and nine. Day in, day out --

The doctor is appalled at the situation. That evening he describes his own boyhood on the farm,

> the brook dividing the lawn from the orchard, where he had gone fishing; elms in the meadow, like dark bouquets held high, and young lambs frisking, and grazing cattle; and I saw the scarlet maple sheltering a bird-house, in one great, leafy arm; and heard the whipporwills in chorus.

He continues,

> "All my life, studying in this country or abroad, and throughout my entire practice, memories like these have proved my deepest source of help and power. But what, I ask you, will the two boys in that wind-crazy house ever remember with joy or thankfulness? What has the future in store for them?"

Remembering the incident, Miss Grayson reviews her own reaction to the drought.

> In those days we were all afraid. We were afraid because it had stopped raining. "Perhaps tomorrow --" we would say, determinedly hopeful. But the morrow brought no change. We told ourselves that it couldn't last; even if it didn't rain this year it would rain next. The Great Plains were subject to periodic drought; the country wasn't finished. Patience was the answer. And strip-farming. We laughed and jested and bore it: we woke up to skies of cobalt blue -- "Well, it's fixing to rain --" and by noon the blue had turned to cocoa-colour, and by evening to a gray pall, and no stars twinkled; and the wind kept whistling, high and thin and mournful, like sea-birds crying. . . Thunder-god, hear thou our medicine-rattles! Drought has possessed the land and the people are athirst; let but a single drop cool the parched earth, so that we may know we are not forsaken; let

> the clouds foreshadow and the heavens open. . . . From how many hearts was the agonizing cry wrung -- "I thirst --" like a poignant echo of Calvary.
>
> True, we had the sense of sanctuary. But was Saskatchewan. . . the question died on that intolerable ache in the throat. . . finished? really finished? Had she indeed, like a spoiled and handsome profligate, spent all? The sullen heaving soil, and fence-posts almost buried, yes, we have seen these, and the lean helplessness of the land, and we have heard the dry rattle of the leaves, and have seen the rain-clouds mass and form, and then sweep over, with no drop fallen; and there were men who came to the door and entreated, with a look of haunting in their sunken eyes, that one buy a magazine subscription.
>
> And we tried belittling and discarding the lessons of history. We tried to forget deserted villages set in canyon-cliffs, and the jungle creeping through Mayan temples, and cities buried under shifting dunes. It couldn't happen here, we persisted; but it was a boast rather than a faith. For what was faith? A reed shaken in the wind.

Grayson, too, completes the cycle with the coming of the rains, but she does not stop there. She returns to the Doctor's speculation about the ultimate effects of a dry, barren childhood.

> But the rains came. There is no sweeter music than the sound of rain falling in the night. Nights in which at last we lay relaxed, listening to the rain as though to the stroking of harp-strings. There were showers and torrents, the drought had broken, O, thank heaven, it *can* rain! And the scorched earth drank deep. Our prairie had not betrayed us. Rain coursed in rillets through the gaping cracks, and fell in toy niagaras over sun-dry ledges, and the chartreuse-gold of the wild mustard was like an evensong. O, mercy of the rain! O, Laughing Water!
>
> Yet I often mused upon the doctor's concern for the two boys, and that grim and sorry adolescence; wind-wearied soil, blowing, blowing; a father's face scored by anxiety,

> and a mother's dulled by grief; the door of the schoolhouse locked, the spectre of starvation, and the dust blowing. I am still wondering whether, when war broke out, they might have been counted among those recruits who, if not quite illiterate, but nearly so, were given the elementary teaching that had been cut short; the house where they lived stands empty, paintless, windowless; if they were here now galaxies of sunflowers would dazzle them; but in the 'dirty thirties' there was nothing to stay for; the road stretched and waited.
>
> And I wonder how they met the chances of life elsewhere, whether deficiencies were ever made up, made up, I should specify, to whatever extent atonement is possible, when the saving, humanizing graces of a child's birthright have been contraband. Or do they, in a world confused by riches, by poverty, by uniformity, by chaos, by nationalism, by anarchy, drift from port to port, from city to city, 'banked burning in their eyes.' 16

Later, in an account of a bus ride, there is a second reference, much less poetic, to the depression. The author is seated beside a woman whose conversation, which is interspersed in the book by overheard snatches of conversation from passengers around them, is a reminiscence of her experiences as a teacher during the thirties. She has never liked the prairie, she explains, since the depression.

> "I was teaching in a school fifteen miles from F--. It was all bald prairie that year, all brown, not even Russian thistle. . . . And it was the year of the Army worms. They came in droves, they'd strip a garden dry, and the wall of a house would be gray with them. I was boarding with people who lived in a bungalow, with beaver-board partitions. They were French. My bedroom had once been a clothes closet off their bedroom. They'd been on relief for six or seven years. . . . Oh, the food they sent us was pretty good. Very little meat. But boxes of lemons came, and tomatoes and cucumbers. The worst was teaching

> without a salary. I only got seven dollars in six months. . . . I started the last week in August and at the end of nine days they paid me seven dollars and sixty cents. There were six pupils in the school. The salary was four hundred and fifty dollars yearly, to be paid in ten months, and three hundred would come from the government. The secretary of the board called me on the second day I was there, and told me I'd get the grant, and the board's note for the balance. But six pupils would have to attend every day without missing, so that the average daily attendance would be six. You can see how impossible that would be. I wrote to the inspector and received a curt reply. He said there were hundreds like me. I used to wonder whether a person could die of lonesomeness. And the couple in the room spent the whole night arguing in French. 17

Even the school-house dances -- there were two -- were little relief. She "didn't care much for the boys around there," and the only one who appeared particularly interested invited her to his home, offering his family's absence as an incentive, which finished that friendship. The warm human relationships people talk about when they remember the depression were no part of her experience. It is worthy of note that both Ann Henry and Max Braithwaite found these lacking, also. Perhaps they were reserved for permanent residents of a district, who had a community of interest not shared by the visitor from the city. The woman on the bus, however, does have one warm memory.

> "But I'll never forget the woman I lived with, for one thing. When I was leaving, the money from home hadn't come, that my mother was sending me for my ticket, and if I didn't get to F-- in time to catch the train, there were only two a week, I wouldn't be home for Christmas. That woman was really kind. She had ten dollars put away, that she'd managed to save somehow, and she lent it to me without my even asking her. She only told me not to

> tell her husband. Of course I returned it just as soon as I was home again. But how could she be sure I would? Yet she trusted me." 18

Heather Gilead's biography of her mother, The.Maple Leaf for Quite a While, is another of the prairie memoirs which covers much more than the depression era, but since the author was growing up during the twenties and thirties, much of what she remembers as a child is depression living. She remembers vividly the scarcity of water.

> During the long years of the drought, when all the shallow wells dried up, water was a constant tribulation. It had to be pumped by hand from a deep well -- our nearest one was two miles away -- and carried home in tanks and cans on horse-drawn wagons. The men hated it: it was a whole day's dreary hard labour for two men to fill the tank. As for the housekeeper, she washed mountains of dishes and greasy pots in a little pan of water that became soupier and soupier. Even worse was the cream separator and all those milk pails; milk vessels are curiously nasty to clean even when water is abundant. We budgeted water like money -- and not just for a few weeks at the end of the summer, but for years on end. The water we washed our hair in was saved and reheated for baths and, if not too filthy, would be used again to scrub floors. Clothes had no hope of ever being whiter-than-white. We bathed weekly in a little basin. The men, encrusted with a week's grime from the fields, rated full basins, but children did not. Every chore was harder and, being done, was less well done for want of water. No housekeeper who has experienced a prolonged, acute shortage would swap an abundance of water for all the gadgets and mechanical aids imaginable. 19

Gilead discusses other staples of the depression: the lack of money for taxes, and the resulting absence of funds for paying the teacher's salary, the food, the clothing. She writes with a pleasant, if rather caustic, wit. Her father was, for many years, secretary-treasurer of the school board.

> The years of devoted service did not go entirely unnoticed by the community. The day came when the teacher complained -- not to the school board, actually, but loosely around the neighborhood -- that she was not being paid regularly, or in full. In a sudden surge of hitherto dormant civic zeal some of our neighbours organized a public meeting to which my father was summoned, and during which the possibility was bandied about that he might have mismanaged public funds -- or worse. . . .
>
> Why anyone should have hurried into such an accusation is puzzling, for in 1934-7, which was about when this incident must have taken place, a man needed a good memory to recall when he had last paid more than a token amount towards his taxes. Even the most affluent turned out to do road work, repair telephone lines -- anything and everything which would serve in part in lieu of cash payment of taxes. Cash, like the normal seasonal rainfall, had simply disappeared mysteriously and completely from our lives, and to a considerable extent we were back on a barter economy. Our teacher might have considered herself privileged to receive even erratic partial salary; there were large sections of the country, harder hit by drought and depression than our own, where in return for her services a teacher received no more than food and shelter, and she would have to move from one household to the next every few weeks, for no family could spare food for an extra mouth over an extended period. My father's accusers had certainly not discharged their tax arrears; they might at least have made some inquiries before assuming that there was, by some miracle, anything in the education kitty to be mismanaged or misappropriated.

Her father was also a municipal councillor, and in this connection she gives us a glimpse of his political philosophy. He lost his seat on the council, after years of reelection by acclamation, in an election which was bitterly fought over an issue involving a hospital tax which he supported.

> The hospital, the only one within a radius of forty miles, was in desperate

> financial straits at the time, I believe. Hospital ratepayers received treatment at drastically lower fees than non-ratepayers, but suddenly every tax-payer was seized with an unshakable conviction that he and his family were destined to live without illness for ever and ever, bowed down under the additional tax. My father was dropped from the council.
>
> This must almost have coincided with the advent of Social Credit in the province, with its promise to save us all by issuing lots of paper dollars or Deutschmarks or whatever. Their landslide victory finally convinced my father, I believe, that the human race was idiot beyond remedy. He retired, grumbling briefly and mildly, into private citizenship, and stayed there. 20

Commenting on the food, she asserts, as do the majority of those who lived on prairie farms during the depression, that there was no need for anyone to go hungry. She tells of a woman who

> boasted that her children could not drink milk (even though they were milking the cows themselves) because all the milk was needed for the pigs. . . . Yet she was generous enough in contributing of her work and culinary achievements when there was an Aid sale or some other community activity. In fact she was modestly celebrated for her fancy cooking. But my brother Francis, who helped them with their haying a couple of summers, confirmed with sorrow the common rumor that when the party was over and they were back on everyday fare there was literally never enough to eat. There could have been no rational excuse for this. Even during the worst of the drought, gardens in our part of the country were always adequate, and vegetables were at their best about haying time. There would have been no advantage in skimping them to see the produce saved, for there was no sale for it thereabouts, and anyway it would have been shocking to take money for vegetables from neighbours -- like expecting them to pay for their bed if they spent the night. And even if meat was short -- fresh meat was always a problem during the hot weather -- the hens were always laying well during the summer. 21

Fredelle Bruiser Maynard is another who has written a memoir of a childhood on the prairies during the depression, titled Almonds and Raisins. Her earliest memories are of Birch Hills, Saskatchewan, but the family moved to Winnipeg in 1931. Her depression memories therefore involve life in that city. But the depression itself is completely overshadowed, in her memories, by two circumstances which were entirely independent of it: the fact that she is Jewish, and that her father, beloved of herself and her family, was notoriously inept at providing for his family. He ran a general store, or rather a succession of general stores, and the family was only saved from complete economic disaster, not once but repeatedly, by his wife, who was handicapped in her efforts to compensate for her husband's lack of practical common sense by the necessity of doing so without wounding his pride.

The problems this situation created for the family were compounded by the anti-Jewish prejudice which they everywhere encountered. The poverty and fear which the depression brought to other families were already a part of the daily life of the Maynards, and the depression therefore loses its significance entirely, and disappears into the background.

A memoir of a very different kind is Andrew King's Pen, Paper and Printing Ink. This is an account of the printing business in the small towns of the prairies, autobiographical largely because the author was so intimately involved with the printers of the area, and with printing in general. In his chapter "Depression Years," he recounts the experiences of various printers throughout the west, including some quotations from Arthur Menzies, who has been discussed previously. King himself was publishing the Rouleau Enterprise at the time, a weekly based in Rouleau, Saskatchewan. After discussing the means by which several other printers overcame the problem of cash shortages and falling subscription lists, he recounts the following incident from his own experience. He had been accustomed to keeping on staff all year, at full pay, the specially skilled men he needed for rush periods. They repaid him by working long hours at top speed, when occasion demanded, to balance the slack periods when they were not fully occupied.

> During 1931, there came a marked falling-off in business volume, in both poster and newspaper business and it became quite apparent that I had too large a staff. But which of these loyal employees would I discharge. To lose one's job meant entry into the poverty stricken horde of unemployed.
>
> Week after week, when payday came around, the old problem came with it. Each week the thought of laying off any of them became increasingly painful.
>
> The final decision was made by the staff members themselves.
>
> One Saturday morning, they all came into my office with the foreman as spokesman. They had talked the situation over. It was quite apparent to them that the amount of business being done could not support the prevailing payroll.
>
> They had a proposition to make.

> They would all take a ten per cent cut in the hourly rate then being paid them and work only the number of hours needed to produce our work providing such did not go below 30 hours per week.
>
> Their offer brought tears to my eyes. They had solved the problem themselves, in a much fairer manner than I could have done. As time went on, one man had friends pick up a job for him at the coast, then another found employment elsewhere, and soon the staff was of proper size and the rate of pay back to the former level. 22

Probably the two best views of depression life in the prairies are to be found in James Gray's The Winter Years, and in Max Braithwaite's Why Shoot the Teacher. In Braithwaite's account of his experiences during the thirties, depression and drought are the extraordinary elements which affect the lives of the characters; the people themselves are ordinary human beings, each reacting in his own characteristic way to a set of circumstances which is the common denominator in the book. The book is autobiography. The approach to the material is honest and unspectacular. Looking back from a distance of thirty years Braithwaite sees the events with more maturity and greater insight than he did at the time, but his attitude to them has not changed.

The book differs from Gray's The Winter Years in that its purpose is autobiographical rather than historical. Gray is writing to describe what conditions were like during the depression; Braithwaite is telling us what happened to him during the six months he taught in a small country school near Alsask in 1933. Yet, just as Gray tells us incidentally a good deal about his own life at the time, so Braithwaite tells us a good deal about the depression. His book is particularly interesting, in that it gives an unbiased report of what life was like in one of the poorer areas of dried-out Saskatchewan during the thirties. Ross shows it to us as it appears from a manse in a small town. Lysenko describes it as it looks -- or perhaps as she imagined it would look -- to the eyes of a school teacher from Winnipeg. The farmer's view appears in several places as we have seen. There are many reports by the casual observer who travels through the hot, dry, soil-drifted country and is appalled at the desolation. But Braithwaite's view is probably the most enlightened and objective picture to be found. Braithwaite is a Saskatchewan product, accustomed to the emptiness of the prairie, and the vagaries of Saskatchewan weather. He has lived all of his life in the city, so that his view of country life is not obscured by familiarity. The environment is new to him, so he sees what is there; the country is his own, so he understands it. He is open-minded, impressionable, young, and himself destitute. He not only visits the area, he lives there for six months, and shares the hardships about which he writes. As the school teacher, living in the school, he finds himself in the centre of community activities, his home the hub of the social activity of the district.

The outsider who writes about the prairie farmer during the drought dwells on two elements which Braithwaite, showing his familiarity with Saskatchewan psychology, almost takes for granted. The farmer's attachment to his land appears only briefly, in the book, and then the comment comes from the lips of an outsider seeing the country for the first time, an English bride coming to her new home in the west.

> What a wretched trip home it was. Them pointing things out to me all along the way -- gophers, and hawks in the sky, and the ripening grain. They all loved it so much I could see. But it was so strange to me . . . so strange. 23

The dust storm, too, has become so routine that it is only mentioned casually, toward the end of the book, as if it were so familiar it hardly merited comment.

> In an earlier chapter I said there was nothing meaner, crueler, or more relentless than a prairie blizzard. There is, of course. A prairie dust storm. Warm winds blow over the tilled fields turning the soil to powder, then pick up the powder and incorporate it into the atmosphere. Wherever air can go, so goes dust. Under window sills and doors, into milk and water and food and lungs. It clogs the nose, smarts the eyes, grits the teeth, and plugs the ears. It covers the surface of floors, desks, and tables with a grey film, gets between the pages of books, into the furthest corners of desk drawers, and onto the dishes on the shelves. Against driving snow you can bundle up. Against dust there is no defence. 24

It is an unemotional passage, with none of the passionate intensity we have seen in previous descriptions. The dust is a physical nuisance, not an antagonist to be battled and overcome, or a malignant force to be feared.

In the course of the six months during which Braithwaite taught in the district he came in contact with most of the aspects of life in the area, and he records them all. He describes the living conditions, the food, the transportation, the entertainment, the family life. The three major public gatherings he attended, all of which took place in the school house, are the three activities characteristic of rural life of the period: the schoolhouse dance, the political meeting, and the Christmas concert. He was personally involved in all three, and since they were new to him, their impression on him was vivid.

His description of the well-remembered schoolhouse dance is in the same low key as his account of the dust.

> So they came, the old and the young, each with their bundles, many with babies. Some had come from as far as twelve miles, a three-hour journey over a winding snow trail. In the bottoms of their sleigh boxes they'd put stones, heated in the stove and wrapped in newspaper for foot-warmers. Some of the sleigh boxes were half filled with straw so that the children could snuggle down out of the wind like mice in a stack.
>
> Why did they come? It was a break in the dreary drag of the winter months. They were sick to death of playing rummy and cribbage and of the sound of each other's voices. They'd had a belly-full of togetherness, babies, grandmothers, old-maid aunts, grown-up sons with no place to go, huddled in a few draughty rooms like foxes in a den, satiated with the sight and sound and smell of each other. This was their chance to break out for a few hours, see different faces, hear some gossip. Find out about that cow of Mark Brownlee's that was due to calf, the vicissitudes of fate, the shortage of feed, the uselessness of the Bennett nickel -- a five-cent bonus on every bushel of wheat paid through the good offices of a prime minister who, like everyone else, was rendered confused and inept by the magnitude of the depression.

Braithwaite's bed, in the basement, was stacked full of babies; his kitchen-dining room full of food.

> Upstairs were all the people in the district over the age of three. The very young squirmed on the laps of the very old. The little girls, with fresh hair ribbons and pressed print dresses, dashed about between their elders, chatted breathlessly, giggled, excited beyond comprehending by they knew not what. The little boys, on the other hand, hands shoved embarrassingly deep into knicker pockets, stood about not knowing quite what to do.
>
> Almost to a man the male adults wore blue serge suits bought, heavens knows how many years before, through the Eaton's mail order catalogue. When the history of American costumes is finally written, the blue serge suit must surely have a special place as the worst fitting, the shiniest and most durable of all articles of clothing. . . .
>
> The women, half a dozen of whom were in various stages of pregnancy, all had the same look of tired resignation. But, miraculously, as the evening progressed and the dancing became more animated, I was to notice this expression gradually change, the eyes regain a little of their sparkle, the cheeks a slight splash of colour and, from behind the tired, worried countenance, I got the occasional fleeting glimpse of what that face had been before the years -- only a few, really -- of drought and cold and worry and childbearing had cast them in the sad mould. The prairies are hard on women. 25

Braithwaite gives us, too, the only good description of what it was like to live with the grasshoppers.

> The grasshopper plague which had been building for years was reaching its peak. . . . Grasshoppers were everywhere. When you walked across the school yard they jumped ahead of you in thousands. Children running along the paths of the baseball diamond slid long before reaching base. Chickens ate them by the bushel, thus spoiling both eggs and meat. Cars on highways had to wear protective screens over their radiators. Grasshoppers got into the milk pails and into the souls of men. 26

~~He~~ describes, too, the Russian thistle which was as much a part of the landscape as the dust. Some of the pleasant aspects of the time, consistently ignored by other writers, creep into his tale as well. The radio, previously encountered only as a medium for transmitting the words of Bible Bill Aberhart, takes on its true role as entertainment.

> I noted then something I was to note many times during subsequent uninvited visits to the English home. When he touched his radio knobs, Lyle English did so with something akin to reverence. And well he might. The radio was his concert hall, sports arena, public forum, newspaper. It was more. It was his contact with the world of sport which he loved above all else. Sitting beside that long walnut box, he could be thousands of miles away. In Yankee Stadium watching a World Series game, at Madison Square Gardens marvelling at the artistry of Barney Ross, at Churchill Downs cheering Top Flight in the Derby. . . .
>
> After dinner it was the same thing. While coal burned in the large heater, throwing a flickering glow through the tiny mica squares of its door, we sat in a semi-circle and laughed at the jibes of Eddie Cantor and Rubinoff and his violin. Good entertainment can always take me completely out of myself and whatever condition I'm in, no matter how miserable it may be. [27]

The saskatoons, which were a prairie mainstay during the thirties, are here for the first time given due recognition.

> As a boy I remember the annual berry-picking expeditions being as important as the potato crop. Everybody went; everybody picked. We came home with washtubs and boilers filled with the plump blue berries, and for the next couple of weeks mother was busy putting them into sealers. It was a bad winter, indeed, that we entered without four or five dozen quart sealers of saskatoon berry preserves in the basement. And we were town people.

> And there's no doubt that during the thirties when apples, oranges, and almost every other kind of fruit were scarce as new cars on the prairies, saskatoons saved many from vitamin-deficiency ailments. By spring you were so hungry for something fresh you'd sit for hours in the sun, pulling grass roots and eating the tender ends. And when berry time came you stuffed yourself with all you could hold. 28

Braithwaite gives us a different view, also, of western politics. His picture of the prairie socialists is compassionate, but not flattering.

> Bewildered, embittered men they were, who had fought drought, grasshoppers, gophers, blizzards, frost, and heaven knows what else to establish homes on the plains. Mostly they were uneducated men who'd come west instead of going to school. Prior to the war they'd seen good times and bad, but mainly their fight was against nature. After the war times had been good. And now, because of a mysterious force called "economics" about which they knew nothing, they were losing everything and they began to ask themselves "Why?" Why is a bushel of wheat worth two dollars ten years ago now worth forty cents? Same wheat. Same sweat and work and worry goes into producing it. Why? Why? Why?
>
> And this led them into the labyrinth of economic theory; supply and demand, profit and loss, foreign trade, fiscal policies. In the long winter nights by flickering coal-oil lamps men who for years hadn't read anything more than the Free Press Prairie Farmer pored over books they didn't understand, often mouthing the unfamiliar phrases again and again, memorizing them, running their fingers along the lines to keep the place. They kept dictionaries by their sides, looked up the words of the economic jargon, and fitted them into their conversation, often with devastating results. They wore out their eyes studying and sent to Eaton's for glasses. Such were the early prairie socialists, born out of a desperate need to save themselves from destruction by a foe they couldn't see or understand. 29

The farmer who preaches socialism and Social Credit -- he seems not to distinguish between them -- is the neighborhood crack-pot, respected as a farmer and a thinker by neither his neighbours nor his wife. The "solid citizen" character takes a different view.

> "Call them what you want, they're still Communists. Listen, all we need to do is throw out that Anderson Government and put the Liberals back in power. Biggest mistake this province ever made, voting in those Conservatives. . . .
>
> "Look here, I know things aren't perfect. I've got a loan at the bank too, that I'm having trouble paying. But that's due to the drought and the bad price for wheat. Good God, let's not burn down the barn because the manure pile's too big. These crackpots talk about socialism. They want to take everything from everybody and spread it all around! That's fine for them. They've got nothing anyway. I tell you, when we get the Liberals back in power. . . both in Saskatchewan and Ottawa . . . things will change. I've worked hard for my farm. And I own it clear. I'm not going to give it up to those crackpots."
>
> "But . . ."
>
> "Take this idea of theirs about socializing the banks and setting up a central bank. What good would that do? Did you ever see anything run by politicians that wasn't either crooked or stupid?"
>
> "But don't you think unemployment insurance, for instance, might be a good thing?"
>
> "Unemployment insurance! Are you crazy? Paying a man for not working! Who's going to work if he can get paid for not working? Answer me that! It's against human nature. And this damned fool over in Alberta, promising everybody twenty-five dollars a month for nothing. Did you ever hear anything so crazy in your life?" 30

Braithwaite's Never Sleep Three in a Bed is autobiographical as well, written after Why Shoot the Teacher, but preceding it chronologically. It ends where the depression begins, and its conclusion is an excellent interpretation of the atmosphere from which the depression sprang.

> That was in the fall of 1929. And so convinced was the teaching staff that God was on Wall Street, and all was right with the financial world, that they were into the stock-market up to their ears.
>
> Yes, even school-teachers, traditionally the most timid members of society, were getting into the act, and if that doesn't indicate that something was wrong I don't know what would. Of course people had gone mad. They actually believed that all anyone had to do -- regardless of whether they knew anything about the stock-market or not -- was to buy as many stocks as possible, often on the instalment plan, and they would be rich. It was like picking money off trees. You mortgaged your house, borrowed on your insurance, sold your car, inveigled a loan from Aunt Clara, and took the plunge.
>
> The sublime simplicity of it! Just phone your friendly broker, and tell him to buy you some stocks. Didn't much matter which. And spread the money out, please; so much down and the balance when the stocks have doubled or tripled in value. Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Buy! Buy! Why work for money when you can get it for nothing? As often as not, the stock-broker, confident that all stocks would go up, would take some of your money and buy stock for himself, figuring on paying you back out of his profits. It was a merry-go-round of financial bliss. Everybody could play. Even the school-teachers.[31]

Then came the crash, and the demand for more margin.

> "But I haven't got it!"
>
> "Borrow it; sell something. You've got a big investment here and you don't want to lose it."
>
> "Are you sure this is just a temporary slump?"
>
> "Of course. Listen, all the big boys are in up to their necks. They're not going to let the whole thing collapse."

But it did collapse.

> As students we were amused and dismayed, depending on whether or not our fathers had been hit by the crash. But like our seniors

> we were confident that all would be well. Hadn't we been taught that we were the favoured of the gods? Didn't we know that ours was the best country in the world, run by the fairest government, and part of the Great British Empire upon which the sun didn't dare to set?[32]

This is the point in time from which Gray begins his story. The Winter Years is somewhere between autobiography and history. It is the account of the author's experience during the thirties, and it is the most revealing view of the depression on the prairies that we find in the literature. Gray is in a position to show us the period from all points of view, for he was unemployed, he was on relief, he took part in the work projects manufactured for relief recipients, and later he found work which took him through the country where he saw various aspects of the depression he had not experienced first-hand. He views the whole through the eyes of a journalist.

Gray gives us, in his introduction, a brief glimpse of his life before the crash, as a necessary background for understanding the impact of the depression. He was a young married man in 1929, and he describes the situation in which he found himself, and his reaction to it, as typical. It was, he says, natural in view of the characteristics of the preceding decade, that the depression should find the young married man without savings, probably seriously in debt, and possibly with no real job security. Having been buoyed up since childhood on the crest of a wave of prosperity, he assumed that the buoyance of the economy would continue, and therefore took no thought for the morrow.

> Money, to western people in the 1920's, was not just for spending on creature comforts. Money was for putting into things to make more money. It was for investing in oil stocks, mining stocks, vacant lots, paper plants, and power plants, and above all for 'getting into business for yourself.' The roster of home-grown Alger heroes . . . testified that, with luck and hard work, it was still possible for poor boys to become rich men. 33

Gray's book moves systematically through the depression years, following his own experiences. Like the rest of the prairies he was, at first, reluctant to believe in the reality of the depression. Eventually, however, he was driven to the necessity of applying for relief.

> From our home on Ruby Street in Winnipeg to the relief office at the corner of Xante Street and Elgin Avenue was less than three miles. It could be walked easily in an hour, but I didn't complete the journey the first time I set out, or the second. If I had not been driven by the direst necessity, the third trip would have ended as the first two had done. I would have veered sharply to the right, somewhere en route, to head down town in one last attempt to find a job. But on the third trip the truth could no longer be dodged by any such pointless manoeuvre.
>
> We were almost out of food, we were almost out of fuel, and our rent was two months in arrears. At home were my wife and daughter, and my mother, father, and two younger brothers. Applying for relief might prove the most humiliating experience of my life (it did); but it had to be done, and I had to do it. The deep-down realization that I had nobody to blame but myself made the journey doubly difficult. In mid February 1931 I was not yet twenty-five, but I could look back on ten years of psychopathic concentration on getting ahead in life. Then my number had come up and I was confronted with the ego-shattering discovery that there

> wasn't a single employer in all Winnipeg who would give me a job.
>
> I had been out of work since the end of November, and I was already deeply in debt when my job disappeared. I canvassed the Grain Exchange, where I had worked, from top to bottom every week. I tried door-to-door selling, attempted to leave my application with department stores and the Post Office, but nobody was even taking applications, let alone dispensing jobs. There was no alternative to applying for relief. 34

Gray's experiences in applying for relief, and in fulfilling the regulations of the relief office later, point up the fact that the officials responsible for dispensing the relief, and for setting the regulations, were proceeding by a trial and error method. Dependence was a new thing on the prairies, and there was no established procedure which had been previously tested. Nor was there time, with people out of food and fuel in a Canadian winter, to perfect the system or to complete any long-range planning. Nor was there, in fact, any great desire to perfect the system, nor any conviction that changes were necessary.

> In the transition between the 1920's and the 1930's, the most persistent and widely held delusion of all was that unemployment was a temporary thing that would soon pass. As I walked to the Elgin Avenue relief office I believed it; the hundred-odd other applicants I found waiting in line believed it. It was a delusion that encompassed all governments and it was the foundation on which the entire system of unemployment relief was erected. The governments simply adopted whatever method there was in existence for dispensing temporary assistance and extended it _ad infinitum_. 35

Gray goes on to describe in detail the system as it operated in Winnipeg and the problems it created, or failed to solve, for those on relief. Relief covered at first only food and fuel, and later clothing, but it was difficult, if you were on relief, to come by many things which were necessities of life. Relief vouchers would not cover expenditures for such purposes, and if the relief recipient earned money his relief allowance was cut.

> Relief recipients who earned money had to bring signed statements of their earnings from their employers. This was an embarrassment to the sensitive, who were not anxious to have the employer know they were on relief. Occasionally, an employer, knowing something of his employee's difficulties, would turn in a voucher falsifying the amount of the payment. There was, in fact, not a single regulation that was not constantly being broken by collusion of one kind or another. Some landlords, particularly in the least desirable districts, kicked back small amounts from the rent to the tenants. In order to prevent the spread of chiselling, the department expanded its investigation department, which seemed to be in constant communication with half the community. The other half, of course, was happily scheming to help relief recipients circumvent the regulations. 36

Gray dwells at some length upon the deterioration of the social conscience resulting from this wholesale evasion of the regulations by both employer and employee. He outlines, too, the almost inhuman bitterness which the employed element frequently felt for the unemployed. It is the attitude of the California land owners toward Steinbeck's Okies, translated into the terms of the Winnipeg labor market.

> The lives of the employed were hardly less unnatural than those of the unemployed. The average worker lived close to the edge

> of his income, no matter what it was. He looked forward to the next pay increase so that he could afford something more or something better for his family. But in those days no one in western Canada could look forward to a raise. The workers had to adjust their lives to the possibility of more salary cuts and more lay-offs -- not to raises in pay. No matter where they worked, they were conscious of a stream of people coming in every day looking for jobs -- their jobs! A $20-a-week job could be filled a hundred times over in a single day for $15 a week.
>
> If the people on relief would only have stayed there and not tried to find jobs, they might not have engendered so much fear. But we did try to find jobs, and the people who had them naturally resented the fact. Under such circumstances, it would have been ridiculous to expect them to understand our problems, for we did not understand theirs. On the one hand, they often regarded the unemployed as a lot of lazy louts who were content to spend their lives in idleness while the rest of the community kept them. Yet they would insist, in the same breath, that the regulations should be so drawn as to make it as difficult as possible for us to have anything above the mere relief allowance if we managed to get jobs. 37

Gray takes a look, also, at the makeshift work dreamed up for the relief recipient, designed to hoodwink both the relief recipient and the taxpayer into thinking that the relief money is being earned. Such work, known as "boondoggling," was as experimental and ever-changing as the other relief regulations. Like them it began with the work designed for those on temporary relief: cutting and piling wood in the city wood-yard. From there it progressed through manufactured clean-up jobs (in one of which the workers were required to gather stones at random, dig a hole for them and cover them over) to digging dandelions from the boulevards under the supervision of a gang foreman. Eventually these activities were abandoned altogether.

Work, however useless, served to while away some of the time, and without it time hung heavy on the hands of the unemployed. Gray devotes some attention to the means used by the unemployed to entertain themselves -- an aspect of the depression little emphasized in the imaginative writing. Mrs. Bentley's long walks down the railroad track are the result of boredom rather than any positive pleasure in the activity. Vera Lysenko's characters in Westerly Wild use their social activities for recreation, but their atmosphere is one of gloom rather than relaxation. The neighborhood gathering in The Homesteaders has as its motivation assistance for someone in need rather than entertainment, and in any case it was an activity carried on in normally free hours, rather than a means of filling in the extra hours made available by unemployment. Gray talks of the daytime activities geared to the empty purses of the family on relief. The long walks, providing both exercise and cheap entertainment, were characteristic activity of the depression, but the walks of The Winter Years, unlike those of Mrs. Bentley, are companionable activities.

> As it did for so many others on relief, necessity turned Kay and me into inveterate walkers. From having to walk wherever we went, walking became a pleasure, and we seldom went to bed without a stroll around the neighborhood. Rooming-house living

> had given us both an obsession to own a home of our own, which on our rambles developed into an insatiable interest in houses under construction. We frequently spent the evening making the rounds of construction projects and in the process developed a proprietory interest in the houses we liked. Very few homes were being built, so it was a long walk between houses, but we thought nothing of trudging a couple of miles in search of new construction. 38

The walking was supplemented by such entertainments as were afforded by auction sales (most, having no money, were spectators rather than buyers), radio listening, the police court, petty gambling. Daytime activities, when the women were mainly busy with housework, included games such as horseshoes, baseball (until the men were ejected from the children's playground by an irate supervisor) and solitary guessing games devised by the man who had nothing more urgent with which to occupy his mind.

> Recreation, like almost everything else, depended a great deal on where the people lived. There was one fellow who, from the way he told it, spent most of the depression standing on the Arlington Bridge, watching box-cars being shunted over the hump in the C.P.R. assembly yard. He said he had become such an expert in gauging the speed of the cars that he could guess within a yard where they would stop. He used to wait around the Woodyard in search of someone to walk home with him so he could demonstrate his skill.39

Occasionally a relief recipient found a way of turning the relief regulations themselves into free entertainment.

> The weirdest pastime I ever encountered on relief might well have derived from Allen's Alley or an adventure of Charlie McCarthy or Mortimer Snerd. Its central character was an automobile nut who didn't let his being

> on relief interfere with his compulsive shopping for used cars. We got our relief vouchers the same day, and I often ran into him at the Woodyard. He always had exciting new stories about his adventures among used-car lots around, and he used to wander from one to another having the cars demonstrated for him by eager salesmen. . . .
>
> One day he ran into a salesman who looked familiar. It was while they were out for a demonstration that the salesman recognized him.
>
> "Say," said the salesman, "I know where I've seen you. You're on relief! You were at the Woodyard a couple of weeks ago, so how the hell can you afford to buy a car? I'll bet you're still on relief!"
>
> They had taken the car out into the country for a road test. The salesman, wild with rage, cursed his customer, opened the car door and pushed him out to get back home as best he could. Then, a few minutes later, the salesman came back, apologized, and picked him up and drove him home.
>
> "Boy, what a sucker that salesman was! You see, for him to have recognized me from the Woodyard he had to be on relief himself. So when he's half way back to town he realized I could turn him in to the investigators, so he gets in a panic and rushes back to pick me up. And now have I got that guy in a hole! When I feel like going for a ride at night, I just call this guy up, tell him I want to go for a ride, and believe me, I go for a ride!" 40

There were other aspects of being on relief which were less entertaining. Landlord-tenant relations were a continual source of irritation to both parties. Before a family could obtain relief vouchers for rent, their rent had to be two months in arrears -- a regulation which did nothing to foster harmony with the landlord -- and the relief allowance when it came was never sufficient for rent on a house, or for mortgage payments. Families on relief were gradually forced, by these circumstances, into rented rooms, and with two or three families crowded into one dwelling friction was inevitable. Gray's account of his experiences with landladies, like his whole account of the depression, is the story of the people he met. This is the fabric of which the book is made: tales of individuals and their struggle to cope with the situations into which they were forced by the circumstances of the times. Most of these people are obscure individuals, with a story known only to themselves and to those they encountered in their daily lives. A few, like John A. Machray and Judge Lewis S. George Stubbs, were public figures whose famous or infamous careers held the public interest, and provided employed and unemployed alike with material for conversation.

There is little in Gray's book which could not be quoted verbatim as an account of what it was like to live through the thirties. As his circumstances improved and he found work as a journalist he became more objective in his examination of depression conditions, and his book becomes less autobiographical and more historical. It is interesting to place his account of a visit to a dried-out (and partially abandoned) Saskatchewan farm beside the fictional representations of the same situation. The episode is recounted in too much detail for satisfactory quotation. The whole tone of the encounter, however, is cheerful and matter-of-fact. The woman and children, left behind on the dried-out farm while the husband has gone north in search of work, have adjusted to their circumstances and developed a way of life which, though lonesome, has become a relatively contented routine. The children accept the circumstances of their lives without question; they have never known anything different. The woman, like the rest of the country, is waiting for better times, which in this instance means better weather, but meanwhile she takes quiet pride in making the most of what little she has. Her explanation of their water use is typical of her attitude.

> When we were finished washing Bob carried the water that was left in his basin over to the garden and threw it on the carrots. I simply emptied my basin on the ground. Bobby, who had been watching, rushed into the kitchen.
>
> "Mommie," he shouted in a hoarse whisper, "Mommie, the man threw the water away! He just threw it away!"
>
> His mother shushed him. . . . "What you should have done," our hostess explained with a laugh, "was to empty your basins into that barrel by the back door. That's my clothes water. Perhaps you won't believe it, but the dirt quickly settles to the bottom of the barrel and the water on top is quite clean although some of the soap still stays in the water. A funny thing I've noticed -- I get my clothes a lot cleaner with less work and less water since we had to start saving wash-up water. After I'm through with my wash, the water goes on the garden. If it had not been for the washwater, there'd have been no garden this year. It's hard to believe such a little bit of water could make such a big difference.[41]

"This," Gray tells us, "was about as typical a farm family as would be found in south-eastern Saskatchewan."[42]

> And they owed -- Mrs. Simpson had no idea how much. At first, she said, they had worried themselves sick over their debts. They owed the bank, and they owed on the mortgage, and for machinery, and for taxes, and then for seed loans. They hadn't paid any interest on their debts in years, let alone made any payments on principal. But she fell into the phrase that had become as common to the Dust Bowl as 'manana' was to Mexico -- "You can't get blood out of a stone." It was quite clear that the Simpsons had stopped worrying about their debts a long time ago. 43

Gray's description of the social life of rural Saskatchewan is more detailed than anything found in the fiction.

> Life went on for farmers on relief in Saskatchewan as it did for the unemployed on relief in Regina, Winnipeg, and Edmonton. There was a dance some place every week, Mrs. Simpson said, and even the poorest couple seemed able to dig up the fifty cents admission price. The fact that half the people who went to the dances couldn't dance didn't matter. The going and coming was special fun, particularly in the winter, when they filled the wagon-boxes with straw and turned the journey into a neighbourly tally-ho and sang all the way to the dance and back. Then there were showers and wedding parties and christening parties for the women, and curling and bonspiels for the men, though lack of water for ice-making had cut down on the curling.
>
> It was surprising what nice weddings they were having, with so little to start with, she reflected. The wedding dresses and bridesmaids' dresses were lent back and forth and nobody thought anything about it. And why not? she asked. What good was a wedding dress after a wedding, except to wear to another wedding? You sure had to hand it to these kids, she said, so many of them getting married, even when they didn't have to, and starting out with nothing and no prospects either. 44

There is an interesting comment, too, on the trek north in search of better territory, and the reasons for remaining on dried-out land year after year.

> I asked her why they hadn't joined the trek to the north in 1934, when a quarter of the farmers in the Dust Bowl further west had moved out. Her answer came quickly, as proof that it was a familiar subject. They were among friends they had known for most of their lives, and there were ties of families and friends that kept them from breaking the circle. There was a touch of gold-miner psychology to it as well -- a reluctance to stop digging for fear the next shovelful would uncover the mother lode. They had sweated out the bad times for so long, things just couldn't go on like this forever. When they got down in the dumps, they had only to remember the crops they had grown during those first years.[45]

Perhaps most of all, their circumstances were made bearable by the fact that all of them -- friends, relatives, farmers and townspeople -- were experiencing the same difficulties. There was nothing for anyone in the whole area. "It was a Chinese cook in a restaurant in Fillmore who described it best, in 1934, when he said in fractured English: 'No wheat, no pasture, no garden. Nothing of everything all over.'"[46] In the introduction to The Winter Years Gray tells us:

> If this book has any viewpoint it is that the depression brought out more of the best than it did the worst in people; that people, if left alone, tend to work out their own problems for themselves; that expert advice, particularly in economic matters, is most useful when it is completely ignored; that so much was learned from the depression that it will never happen again.[47]

Men Against the Desert takes the final conclusion of The Winter Years one step farther. Not only was so much learned from the depression that it will never happen again. In an agricultural sense, much was learned from the experiences of prairie farmers during the thirties that agriculture all over the world has profited from.

> And so it was that after the wounds of the Palliser Triangle were bound up and healed, its productivity was marvelously restored by the blades and discer seeders developed by Noble and Johnson with the help they got from the Palmers, Chesters, Thomsons, Denikes, Matthews, Hardys and Lewis' and all the rest. And it was these, with such other exclusively Canadian developments as summerfallowing, strip farming, trash fallowing, trap stripping and grasshopper poisoning, that helped transform the agriculture of the earth and to make unproductive lands productive, and brought the hope of an adequate food supply to millions of the ever-hungry people of the world. 48

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to his wide-ranging provincial study, Saskatchewan, Edward McCourt provides what is probably the most complete and concise resumé of the depression years on the Saskatchewan plains. In a page or two he shows us three views of the depression: the personal view of the drought as it appeared to those who suffered through it and watched others suffer; the historical view, detailing the magnitude of the disaster in economic and social terms; the restrospective view, speculating about the effects of the depression experience on the characters and attitudes of its own and following generations.

> Any attempt to explain why the Saskatchewan man differs to a noticeable degree in personality and outlook from the Albertan or Manitoban who should logically be his counterpart must take into account the consequences, both physical and psychological, of the dust-bowl years. The world-wide economic depression that began in 1939 affected all of Canada; Saskatchewan bore an additional and dreadful burden -- nine successive years of drought and crop failure. "The people of Saskatchewan have suffered a reduction of income during the last decade which has probably been unparalleled in peacetime in any other civilized country," the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations reported in 1939. (Incredbily, the net agricultural incomes for 1931 and 1932 were reported in minus figures.) "The land was a landscape of almost incredible desolation," a Regina newspaper reporter wrote

> after driving through southern Saskatchewan in the mid-summer of 1934, "as lifeless as ashes, and for miles there was scarcely a thing growing to be seen. . . . Gaunt cattle and horses with little save their skins to cover their bones stalked about the denuded acres, weakly seeking to crop the malign Frenchweed which seemed to be maintaining some sickly growth. When the miserable animals moved it seemed as if their frames rattled. The few people in evidence in the little towns appeared haggard and hopeless. . . ."
>
> The year 1937 brought the worst disaster of all. No rain fell, the wind blew what little topsoil remained in the fields into roadside ditches; dust-clouds -- black, sinister, shot through here and there with eerie shafts of light -- wavered all day and every day between earth and sky, and the heat was appalling. . . .
>
> Government relief alone kept many Saskatchewan people alive, . . . and there was talk in eastern Canada of moving the Saskatchewan farm population to the northern Ontario bush. The wheat crop that year averaged two and one half bushels to the acre.
>
> But there was little thought of quitting -- and none at all of moving to the Ontario bush. The bewilderment and despair of the earlier years had by 1937 given way to a sterner emotion, and the people now took a kind of defiant pride in showing the world their strength to endure, without flinching, the worst that nature could do to them. "The country is dismal, scorched, smashed," the mayor of Assiniboia said, "But the people are magnificent." He was right. No one could survive nine years of hell without courage. Nor without faith -- not in a benevolent god but in one's own capacity to endure.
>
> Nor without scars. . . . For the people of Saskatchewan that nine years' sojourn in a dust-darkened wilderness was a genuinely traumatic experience which has left its mark not only on those who actually lived through the Dirty Thirties but to some degree on their descendants."[1]

He completes the picture by continuing to explain, in terms of environmental influence, the turbulence of the political scene on the prairies.

McCourt is writing about Saskatchewan, but his observations apply as well to those parts of Manitoba and Alberta which experienced the drought, and in some instances to those who struggled against "natural forces more hostile than benevolent"[2] in any part of the plains. The drought established its own boundaries, natural, not political. It provides a background for Margaret Laurence's stories of Manawaka, Manitoba, and its presence is strongly felt in Kroetsch's Alberta novel, The Words of My Roaring. McCourt's three approaches to the depression are, as we have seen, the three angles from which the subject is viewed by the literature as a whole. Writing in 1968, McCourt looks back on the depression just as Harry Boyle and James Gray do. When they talk about what the experience did to those who lived through it they are turning their eyes inward, each man questioning its influence on his own life and character, and those of his family and associates. This is the aspect of the depression that is important in Harry Boyle's The Great Canadian Novel. What he says about the depression itself is incidental to his study of the present in the person of Shane Donovan. Early in the book Boyle says Shane often felt that what was happening to him during the affluent sixties was

> the norm of his life. That wasn't true because back of it were those early years of boyhood imprisonment in the dusty dreariness of Nonsuch, Saskatchewan. No matter what he did, part of him was chained to that static and unsophisticated memory.

> He shared it with an entire generation
> in North America.[3]

Writing about that generation, Boyle cannot avoid the presence of the depression in his novel; it claims a place in the fabric of the modern Canadian society about which he writes.

The concept of the depression years as "static" is repeated by Patricia Blondal in the introduction to her novel A Candle to Light the Sun. She, too, uses the depression as a background from which her story emerges. It is the lingering after effects of the depression rather than the depression itself which influence the course of her novel.

The full-length prairie autobiographies use the depression simply as an experience, as something which, because it happened during the life span of the author, has its place in the narrative. The period receives more attention from those autobiographers who limit themselves to the thirties, as Ann Henry does, for instance, in her autobiography, and as Braithwaite does in Why Shoot the Teacher. The former, while it concentrates on the depression years, takes such a completely personal view that it sheds little light on the period itself. With Braithwaite, however, we move into drought-ridden Saskatchewan, live with the people, look around at the country, listen to the discussions. Although the book was written long after the experience, its action is involved with the immediate situation; there is little to make us feel that we are seeing events from a distance. James Gray's treatment, like McCourt's summary, includes all points of view. The Winter Years is autobiographical, but here the personal experience is incidental to the study of the period as a whole. It is historical, including facts and figures blended informally into the account. It is personal, quoting comments and telling anecdotes of his own experiences, and those of other people. And it is retrospective, moving through the past to the present, and looking back to assess the lasting results. The depression itself is Gray's central concern.

Some of the imaginative literature treats the depression only incidentally. The Stone Angel shows it briefly through the eyes of Hagar Shipley when she returns to Manawaka to nurse Bram through his final illness. Even then, although she is living in Manawaka and experiencing the same conditions as those around her, she is doubly aloof from the situation, having come to it in the first place as an outsider arriving, without any intention of remaining permanently, after the drought has already done its work of destruction, and once more removed from the actual experience by the point of view from which she tells her story, looking back from the distance of old age. The depression is hardly even an incident in Hagar Shipley's life; rather, it is an incident in the lives of her husband and her sons, experienced during her absence so that she is aware of it only in passing.

Turning to the literature which uses a depression setting, we find a few poems and several minor novels which use the depression as a theme. Short poems by Saunders, Daniels, Laight, Marriott, have as their subject some aspect of the depression. But Watson Kirkconnell's "The Lawyer's Tale", while it describes the drought at more length, is one of a collection of stories, the only one with prairie farm drought as a contributing factor to the action, and it is a tale of fantasy, not in any sense a study of prairie farm life. Vera Lysenko's Westerly Wild is a book about the depression, and Christine Van der Mark interests herself, too, in the circumstances of life during the period, though neither of her books is centred on a depression theme. Five major works of fiction make use of the depression and drought; none of these is basically a study of depression life, but the atmosphere and action of all of them are strongly influenced by the depression environment which they use as a setting. These, with Anne Marriott's poem "The Wind our Enemy," make up the core of prairie depression literature: Who Has Seen the Wind, Music at the Close, The Words of My Roaring, A Bird in the House, and As For Me and My House.

In his anthology, A. J. M. Smith prefaces Anne Marriott's poem "The Wind our Enemy" with the comment that it is "one of the most effective expressions of the tragedy of drought on the prairie that Canadian literature has to offer." The poem combines lyrical and narrative elements, imaginative imagery and concrete detail; the variety of its form and diction is subtly adapted to the diversity of the subject matter. The wind is described in the vigorous introductory stanza,

> Wind
> flattening its gaunt furious self against
> the naked siding, knifing in the wounds
> of time, pausing to tear aside the last
> old scab of paint.[4]

The passage combines an uninterrupted movement of rhythm and the onomatopoeic effect of the recurring sibilants with images suggestive of cruelty and pain and destruction, thus establishing in a few lines the theme of the poem, as well as its atmosphere. The same concentration of effect is found in the harsh inexorable image of the sky "like a new tin pan hot from the oven," "soldered to the earth by horizons of glare."[5] No less effective are the passages which abandon imagery entirely, and rely on blunt simplicity for their power.

> The old mare found the thistle pile, ate
> till she bulged,
> Then, crazily, she wandered in the yard,
> Saw a water-drum, and staggering to its rim,
> Plodded around it -- on and on in hard,
> Madly relentless circle. Weaker -- stumbling --
> She fell quite suddenly, heaved once and lay.
> (Nellie the kids' pet's gone, boys.
> Hitch up the strongest team. Haul her away.)[6]

The poem compresses the whole of the depression experience into a few vivid pictures, a few clichés, a few brief glimpses of the everyday life of the prairie dweller. It shows a sensitive awareness on the part of the poet of prairie drought as a tragedy in human terms. No other piece of literature, poetry or prose, embodies the whole of the prairie depression experience as effectively. The tragedy is not the man-made depression of the east. Its cause lies in the powerful forces of nature, personified here, as in most of the prairie depression literature, by the impersonal, relentless wind.

The intrusion of nature into the literature of the prairies is a subject which interests a number of critics. That Canadian literature as a whole is nature-oriented most of them agree, though opinions vary as to what the Canadian attitude toward it is. "Canadians as a whole do not trust nature," writes Margaret Atwood. "They are always suspecting some dirty trick."[7] She devotes one section of her book to the consideration of nature as a monster, but qualifies the view somewhat. "Nature is a monster, perhaps, only if you come to it with unreal expectations or fight its conditions rather than accepting them and learning to live with them."[8]

That many of the prairie dwellers came to the west with unreal expectations is beyond doubt. Even before the depression, the prairie weather showed itself full of dirty tricks, but by the end of the twenties most of the prairie farmers had accepted the weather conditions of their part of the country, and learned to live with them. In the process they had become aware that nature on the prairies was not to be equated with the milder, less extreme nature of the wooded and well-watered areas of the east. The tricks were still there, but bolder, more violent. Learning to live with prairie nature was a test of strength and endurance, and the prairie farmer survived only by matching trick with trick and strength with strength.

In a sense, then, nature became the adversary, an opponent worthy of respect, willing to share dominion only with those strong enough to survive. The joy of battle and the pride of conquest became a part of life for the prairie farmer, who learned through experience that prairie nature was two-sided, loving mother one minute, monster the next.

This ambivalent attitude toward nature is basic to prairie literature. McCourt, describing the Saskatchewan landscape, speaks of "the occasional vista . . . when a man sees all the kingdoms of the earth stretched out at his feet and feels himself a creature of utter insignificance in the sum of things or else the very centre of the universe."[9] He may, in fact, harbour both feelings simultaneously. "Nowhere else in the west does the stranger feel himself more exposed to the wrath of the gods and the fury of the elements than in the middle of the Saskatchewan prairie,"[10] says McCourt. If, in the face of this wrath and fury, the prairie dweller has managed to endure and to prosper, he becomes in his own eyes what Henry Kreisel refers to as the giant conqueror. "Man, the giant conqueror, and man, the insignificant dwarf always threatened by defeat, form the two polarities of the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie,"[11] Kreisel says. Laurence Ricou, quoting

Kreisel, goes on to demonstrate that the dweller on the prairie feels himself "an obvious intruder,"[12] the only vertical element in a horizontal world. Wallace Stegner, too, makes the vertical-man/horizontal-world comment, but his vertical man is less an intruder than a part of the landscape, a part of nature.

> Desolate? Forbidding? There was never a country that in its good moments was more beautiful. Even in drouth or dust storm or blizzard it is the reverse of monotonous, once you have submitted to it with all the senses. You don't get out of the wind, but learn to lean and squint against it. You don't escape sky and sun, but wear them in your eyeballs and on your back. You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small. But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.
>
> It is a country to breed mystical people, egocentric people, perhaps poetic people. But not humble ones. At noon the total sun pours on your single head; at sunrise or sunset you throw a shadow a hundred yards long. It was not prairie dwellers who invented the indifferent universe or impotent man. Puny you may feel there, and vulnerable, but not unnoticed. This is a land to mark the sparrow's fall.[13]

As the critics suggest, the characters in prairie fiction are always aware of the environment, usually as a hostile force, and they react to it in different ways. Beret from Rölvaag's Giants in the Earth draws the blinds and hides in her trunk, to escape the wrath of the giant; McCourt's Mr. Portingale, rescued half frozen from a Saskatchewan blizzard, reacts differently.

> In the ordinary way Mr. Portingale was the humblest, least aggressive of men, his

> voice an appropriate piping treble, and the strongest expletive any of us had heard him use -- and then only when greatly moved --was 'Gryte Scott!' But now those of us gathered in the kitchen were seeing something vastly more significant than the mere restoration of Mr. Portingale's circulatory system to its more or less normal channels; we were awe-stricken witnesses to a striking spiritual phenomenon peculiar to the prairies. For of a sudden, Mr. Portingale was no longer a humble sheep content to follow the bell-wether of the flock -- he was the Stag at Bay. He glared at us out of red-rimmed bloodshot eyes and flung bloated pin-cushion hands aloft.
>
> "The bloodiest absolutely bloodiest climate on the fice of the bloody earth!" Mr. Portingale bawled. "And by God something's bloody well got to be done abaat it!"

Saskatchewan, says McCourt, teems with Mr. Portingales.

> Scorched by sun and battered by wind three months of the year and confined in a deep freeze for six, the prairie dweller is soon afflicted by a kind of nervous irritability which impels him to flail out in all directions. Being, as a rule, a religious man -- intimate association with nature at its most awesome inclines to make him so -- he hesitates to blame the Almighty for his miseries. The next authority -- human, fallible, vulnerable -- is the government. And something, by God, has got to be done about it![14]

During the thirties the "bloodiest absolutely bloodiest climate on the fice of the bloody earth" outdid itself. Stegner comments that "nature abhors an elevation as much as it abhors a vacuum,"[15] and the levelling winds of the drought period demonstrated the truth of the statement. Nature seemed determined to reduce the country, quite literally, to "the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky."[16] The levelling effect was not, as we have noted, directed toward the land only; it extended to the circumstances of the prairie dwellers. As the depression ground on through the decade the various levels of living blended into a sort of universal poverty. The tendency toward economic uniformity was not reflected in the characters of the prairie men and women, however. Nature as monster cowed timid individuals like the tragic wife in Ross's "The Lamp at Noon," but it aroused the Mr. Portingale in Sean O'Connal. The extremes to which nature resorted during the drought tended to arouse extreme reactions. It is these reactions, rather than the circumstances of the depression, which interest the authors of prairie fiction.

W. O. Mitchell's novel Who Has Seen the Wind is a story about a boy searching for the meaning of life, but since the search takes place mainly during the thirties in Saskatchewan, the depression and drought are there. Sean O'Connal, whenever he appears, brings the drought with him, even when he is producing stories about the little men of County Down for his small nephew.

> "Well we talked an' it turned out he come over third-class -- spent some time in Ontario, then come West to the end of the steel -- the C.P.R. wasn't finished in them days. From there he come on a three-gaited sorrel grasshopper that went lame in the Moose Mountain country. He turned him loose an' come the rest of the way on foot.
>
> "'What the hell made you pick this country?' I asked him.
>
> "'I liked the look of her in them days,' he sez.
>
> "'Look at her now,' I sez.
>
> "'You look', sez he, 'she gives me the heartburn!'" [17]

Sean lives in an atmosphere of rebellion against the failure and frustration imposed upon him by the drought, and by the refusal of his neighbours to join in the battle against it. Failure and frustration are visible on all sides, as Brian looks questioningly around at the life of his small town. Superficially, the view is tragic in spite of its whimsically humorous atmosphere. Defeat, cruelty, injustice, misunderstanding, death, are the things he encounters in his search for knowledge. But in spite of his encounters with the harsh realities of existence, the view of life with which Brian emerges is essentially positive. Birth and death, struggle and failure, are a part of nature and belong in the scheme of things. Lack of understanding, unkindness, cruelty, are alien elements, and must be resisted.

Viewed in this context,Saint Sammy's struggle with Bent Candy is a resistance of alien forces, and since both nature and the Almighty are in league with Saint Sammy, the issue is never in doubt. In coveting the Clydes, and attempting to force Saint Sammy into yielding them to him, Bent Candy is symbolically attempting to rob Sammy of his virtue, to force him into sacrificing the principles without which he cannot enter heaven. As long as they remain in the possession of Saint Sammy, the Clydes not only retain their religious symbolism, but they are entirely in tune with elemental nature. The land they graze is uncultivated prairie, inhabited by life that yields to no artificial influences. Sammy's shelter is hardly more sophisticated than that of the gophers and mice and butterflies which are his neighbours, and he lives in close communion with the Lord who provides for all of them. Bent Candy, on the other hand, lives with artificiality. In a land ravaged by dust and drought he builds a new and shiny barn which serves no practical purpose. Contrasting sharply with its surroundings, it is an affront to nature just as Candy's deliberate attempt to oust Saint Sammy is an affront to God. His religion is as artificial as the prosperity upon which he prides himself. Only when he is brought face to face with the power of an outraged deity does he submit, yielding even then to a superstitious fear which has little in common with Sammy's abiding faith. There is, in the whole episode, no real distinction between God and nature. The forces of nature are tools in the hands of God, and it is impossible to separate them. Man if he is to exist at all, must live in harmony with both. Human life, Mitchell seems to suggest, is a part of a natural plan which encompasses the universe, and only in accepting the plan of nature and moving with it can man find a purpose and a meaning in his life. What is natural is right; what is unnatural does not belong. The struggle, as Jones says in Butterfly on Rock, is between an authentic and an unauthentic way of life.[18]

If this is Mitchell's view, the prairie during the drought provides the ideal background for Brian's development. Mitchell does not dwell upon the depression; it scarcely affects the plot of the story. His characters could have moved through the events in much the same way in any other decade. The depression is a useful tool for bringing out the explosive element in Sean O'Connal's character, and providing motivation for the story of Saint Sammy, but this could have been done equally well by other means. It is the drought, not the depression, that gives the novel's setting its artistic value. During the drought nature was indisputably in control of the prairie. In terms of life and growth, what was not natural perished. The land was reduced to its elements, but it was not a place of dirt and desolation. Where the native vegetation had been left unmolested it continued to grow. When Mitchell describes the prairie he speaks in terms of wind and sun and grass, not dust. The prairie in its natural state is beautiful, even in drought; the young Ben in his natural prairie environment is in tune with nature; Saint Sammy, trusting in the essential rightness of the universe, is vindicated. Mitchell would, perhaps, shorten Margaret Atwood's comment to the simple statement, "Nature is a monster . . . only if you . . . fight its conditions rather than accepting them and learning to live with them." The drought of the thirties demonstrated this. Those who could not accept the harshness of their natural environment left the prairies, or were destroyed. Those who accepted even this aspect of nature, and retained their faith, were vindicated.

But it is no part of Mitchell's philosophy that one should sit idly by and leave nature to fend for herself. Acceptance of what is natural entails resistance of the unnatural. The young Ben, naturally gentle, is roused to fury and violence by cruelty; Digby braves the wrath of Mrs. Abercrombie and her associates by striking the young Ben's name from the school register; the Ben frees the captive owl. In the process of learning to live with nature it is permissible to introduce changes, in line with natural laws. Sean's irrigated garden flourishes, and Brian, at the end of the book, is planning to become a soil scientist. The drought is a useful symbol for Mitchell from this point of view as well, for the dust and destruction it entailed were brought about by man's interfering with nature, cultivating land which should have been left in grass, and using tillage methods which destroyed the natural protective cover of the land. It was only when man adapted his methods to suit natural conditions, substituting a trash cover for the natural protective covering he had destroyed, that harmony with nature was restored. Man, having learned to live with nature, saw the monster image disappear. In choosing the drought of the thirties as a background for his novel, Mitchell is providing a historical setting which reinforces his theme.

It is in the creation of the prairie atmosphere that Mitchell does his best writing. His whimsical humour adds to the enjoyment of the novel, and thematically the book provides much food for thought, but its real strength is in the creation of prairie atmosphere. It is an all-pervading atmosphere, established with the first paragraph:

> Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply of land and sky -- Saskatchewan prairie. It lay wide around the town, stretching tan to the far line of the sky, shimmering under the June sun and waiting for the unfailing visitation of wind, gentle at first, barely stroking the long grasses and giving them life; later, a long hot gusting that would lift the black topsoil and pile it in barrow pits along the roads, or in deep banks against the fences. 19

There are few long descriptive passages; rather, Mitchell relies on a continuity of atmosphere sustained as a background to the action by a descriptive sentence or two at intervals.

> The hum of telephone wires along the road, the ring of hidden crickets, the stitching sound of grasshoppers, the sudden relief of a meadow lark's song, were deliciously strange to him. . . . And all about him was the wind now, a pervasive sighing through great emptiness, unhampered by the buildings of the town, warm and living against his face and in his hair. 20

> After the boy's figure [the young Ben's] had become just a speck in the distance, Brian looked up into the sky, now filled with a soft expanse of cloud, the higher edges luminous and startling against the blue. It stretched to the prairie's rim. As he stared, the gray underside carded out, and through the cloud's softness was revealed a blue well shot with sunlight. Almost as soon as it had cleared, a whisking of cloud stole over it.
>
> For one moment no wind stirred. A butterfly went pelting past. God, Brian decided, must like the boy's prairie. 21

Mitchell uses his stylistic devices to good effect, in such passages. The long sweep of the wind and the level expanse of the prairie are reflected in long sweeping sentences, smoothed with long vowels and liquid consonants. He brings the wind to our ears by the use of a series of soft sibilants, and appeals to sight as well as sound in this sentence which provides atmosphere in an otherwise transitional passage. "A gentle wind stirred the leaves on the poplars, setting disks of shadow dancing over Hislop's earnest face."[22]

The combination of several sensory appeals in a single passage is characteristic of Mitchell's descriptive passages.

> Spring came to the prairie with the suddenness of a meadow lark's song. Overnight the sky traded its winter tang for softness; the snow, already honeycombed with the growing heat of a closer sun, melted -- first from the steeming fallow fields, then from the stubble stretches, shrinking finally to uneven patches of white lingering in the barrow pits. Here and there meadow larks were suddenly upon straw stacks, telephone wires, fence posts, their song clear with ineffable exuberance that startled and deepened the prairie silence -- each quick and impudent climax of notes leaving behind it a vaster, emptier prairie world.[23]

As the story develops we are continually made aware of the prairie atmosphere by such passages, their effectiveness depending largely upon the use of excellent diction. The word combination "impudent climax," for instance, must reproduce the song of the meadowlark for any reader familiar with the sound. The same facility with words serves him, no matter what the atmosphere he wishes to create. "It was a gray world, breathless and transfigured with the thin morning light,"[24] or

> A tumbleweed went bounding past the boy and the old man, caught itself against the strands of the fence, then, released, went rolling on its way. An unnatural dusk that had grown over the whole prairie made Brian strain his eyes to see through the spread darkness of dust licked up by the wind in its course across the land. His ears were filled with the sound of the wind, singing fierce and lost and lonely, rising and rising again, shearing high and higher still, singing vibrance in a void, forever and forever wild.[25]

The language is simple, the sound of the wind echoed in the soft sibilants at the beginning of the passage, the tension built by the rapid succession of ideas and the repetition. As the passage rises to a climax the language changes in tone, losing its simplicity in the sharp intrusion of the unexpected "shearing," the change in emphasis from sibilants to the throbbing v's before the return to the free-flowing sound of the "forever and forever wild." McCourt's view that Mitchell's technical skill and depth of vision are worthy of a less contrived plot seems to me to be justified.[26]

McCourt's Music at the Close is a very different novel, but it makes use of the depression in much the same way. Historically the novel spans the whole of the period between the two world wars, and the fact that the depression did, in fact, precede the war in which Neil died makes Neil's involvement with it inevitable. McCourt uses it to good advantage to demonstrate Neil's character. Neil, as Laurence Ricou suggests, is without doubt an intruder in his environment. Neil himself feels this. Not only does he feel no kinship with his surroundings; he has no love for them, and no desire to become a part of the prairie. His alienation from the land was there before the thirties, but the drought was a contributing factor. "Greed and drought combine to defeat his own grandiose agricultural schemes,"[27] Ricou says, and the comment puts the drought in the proper perspective in Neil's life. It is simply one more element contributing to his failure. The depression is more important than the drought, but only because it plays a greater part in his defeat. Depression and drought combine to prevent his escape from an environment which smothers his creativity.

It is doubtful, however, whether Neil would have been more successful in any other circumstances. McCourt makes it clear that Neil was a poor farmer and could have hoped for only temporary success under the best of conditions. As a business man he was little better. The drought, therefore, cannot be wholly blamed for the failure of his farming venture, nor can we put too much emphasis on the depressed economic conditions which closed other avenues of endeavour to him. Sensitive, easily discouraged, vacillating, given to dreams rather than action, he would probably have found little success in any other occupation. His only real interest is in writing, and the creative artist must have, for success, more inner strength than Neil demonstrates. It is less the drought and depression which defeat him than his own inability to maintain his purpose in the face of the realities of everyday life. John Moss remarks that in Music at the Close "the prairie is a relatively passive setting."[28] The same can be said for the depression and drought.

The novel does, however, provide us with a broader more realistic view of prairie depression life than any other single work of fiction. McCourt relies strongly on attention to detail to lend realism to his settings and events, and in the details of Neil's daily life, just as McCourt includes play-by-play descriptions of the ball games in which Neil participates, so he includes discussions of political and social situations, detailed explanations of the workings of the stock market, an inside look at labor problems in the mining industry, a clear view of Aberhart as he addresses a public meeting, a discussion of the reasons which led some farmers to leave the prairies and move farther north and others to remain. The whole comprises a comprehensive view of life on the prairies during the depression. The depression, however, receives no more emphasis than does the pre-depression period in the earlier part of the book. Neither is important in itself; both are important because Neil lived through them; both are fully described because attention to detail is characteristic of McCourt's writing.

Nevertheless the depression is a very useful tool for McCourt's purpose, for it was a time of testing which brought out the best and the worst, the strengths and the weaknesses, of all prairie dwellers. When conditions were favorable the strong and weak alike met with success; the drought revealed each man for what he was. Neil is a character whose creative strengths are offset by an inability to cope with life. The depression arrived at a point in the story when Neil's life was building to a climax, and McCourt was ready to demonstrate this inability. It provided him with a tool ready-made for his purpose.

The Words of My Roaring is another novel for which the depression offers an ideal background, ready-made. Kroetsch himself calls it a comic novel, and it is comic in the broad and deep sense of the word -- comedy surfacing above serious problems and a serious view of life. The comedy lies not in facile humour, but in the ironic contrast between the ideal and the actual, between the concept and the performance. Johnnie Backstrom sets the tone of the book by refusing to take himself seriously, though he is basically a serious person. We are well into the book before we accept the fact that his irresponsible actions are not those of an irresponsible human being, but of a deeply responsible human being refusing to take life seriously because he recognizes, instinctively, his own inability to measure up to his ideal. Johnnie's whole life is based on paradox -- the same paradox which is the theme of the novel: the contrast between the ideal and the actual, between the dream and the reality. Johnnie's political opponent is Dr. Murdoch, the man who officiated at Johnnie's birth, who was Johnnie's mentor and idol and source of strength; paradoxically, Johnnie opposes the man he wants to support, just as he becomes an undertaker and deals in death when what he really wanted was to prolong life.

> I'm a great one for paradox. My reading of the Bible, I suppose; dying to be born and all that. But really, it isn't an easy place to live. Like when the wind blows black, when it's dry, you drive all day with your lights on. Great electioneering weather. The fish lose their gills in this country. The gophers come up for a bite to eat, and they crawl right into the air.
>
> I won't swear to that -- but it's a God's truth, you have to dream.
>
> I'll tell you something. When I was really a kid, I wanted to grow up and be a doctor. Like old Doc Murdoch. I wasn't an undertaker by nature, I can tell you. That's a frightening word if you think about it. One who takes under. Creepy. I wanted to heal people, save them, make them whole again.
>
> But money was scarce in the family, and maybe brains were too. But nevertheless, that day I didn't get on with the railway; the Doc called me in that day -- into his office. I was all excited. And then he told me the country needs a good undertaker. That hurt me.
>
> I had a great admiration for the Doc. I held him in esteem. 29

The paradox continues throughout the book. Johnnie goes east for his training, graduates with honors, turns down the jobs he is offered and ships out as a seaman, returning to his chosen profession only when it has nothing to offer him. Characteristically, inevitably, he returns to the west and to his undertaking on impulse, drawn by a combination of the two most powerful attractions in his life -- a pretty girl, and Dr. Murdoch. By accident he learns that the Doctor's daughter, Helen, is in the East. On impulse he phones her.

> "Tell me," I said, "do they still need a good undertaker in that burg called Notikeewin, the Wild Rose city?"
>
> "Yes, they need a good undertaker. But who . . . with the kind of drought they're having back West, can afford to bury the dead?"[30]

Back in Notikeewin once more he decides to enter politics. His motive, he tells us, is the indemnity which goes with success. But for a man whose motives are mercenary he is singularly unconcerned with the economic side of life. During the subsequent campaign he ignores his own economic need by becoming a politician when there are dead to be buried, for cash, and becoming an undertaker while prospective voters wait in vain for his appearance at a scheduled meeting. It does not take any great insight to detect the analogy between Johnnie and the clown who is killed in the line of duty at the rodeo. Characteristically once more, Johnnie makes political hay from the tragedy, and when Helen reproaches him for it he drops, for a moment, the clown mask and allows his serious involvement with life to appear.

> "Did my father kill him?" she said.
>
> "A poor innocent clown," I said, "had the life ripped out of him by a black bull." And then I burst out unexpectedly: "No, Helen. No. Your father didn't kill him. At least not all by himself. And nor did the bull, H.P. Because we all killed him.

> All of us there, wanting to be amused. Wanting to be entertained. All of us wanting to be tickled and rubbed and scratched in the armpits and vastly titillated. We all killed him, just as sure as he is stone cold dead. . . ."
>
> "Wouldn't it be nice," I said, "to turn a knob and shut off the human mind? But no, I have to go on thinking. I remember, and I can't forget, H.P. Not just the clown himself, but the crowd watching. The crowd that killed him." 31

Alberta during the thirties, and the Social Credit phenomenon, are the perfect background for Kroetsch's purpose. Alberta, the land of promise; the land of extremes and contradictions, of prairie and mountains, of blizzard and chinook. The thirties, when the clouds which promised rain delivered dust; when the agriculture which had been the backbone of the country's prosperity became the basis of its poverty; when fertility became barren. The country which had exported food to the world went hungry, depending on the charity of the people it had fed. The Social Credit movement, with its reversal of the basic economic tenets of society, its mixture of worldliness and other-worldliness. More than Who Has Seen the Wind, more than Music at the Close, The Words of My Roaring is a book about the depression; but it, too, makes use of its depression material for its own purposes, this time to reinforce a philosophical theme. Against the backdrop of a depression society which failed, year after year, to achieve the success it saw so tantalizingly on the horizon, Kroetsch depicts a humanity forever destined to fall ludicrously short of its own ideals. Laurence Ricou notes the contradictory nature of Johnnie's philosophy.

> The novel leaves him in a conundrum, perhaps to conclude that "chaos is the only order." Though Johnnie Backstrom is "forever condemned to grope," his natural ebullience transforms the groping into part of his essential vitality.[32]

It is this vitality which is the strength of the novel. With only the prospect of ludicrous failure before him, man continues to strive vigorously toward the impossible. For this, too, the prairie farmer, tilling his land and planting his seed year after year in the face of continual failure, provides the appropriate background.

The depression permeates Margaret Laurence's A Bird in the House in the same way that the wind and the prairie permeate Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind. The book does not describe the depression, or explain it, or even acknowledge its presence in any direct fashion; it recreates the depression atmosphere in the minds of its characters, so that it becomes for the reader not a remembered period in history, but a fact of life. Taken as a whole the book shows the effects of the depression on people of all ages, in a variety of circumstances. Vanessa, now an adult, looks back and remembers how the experiences appeared to her as a child, a point of view which allows for a child's unquestioning acceptance of the events as they occur, with a thoughtful evaluation from the adult Vanessa who recalls them. Vanessa the child was impulsive, quick to judge and condemn; the older Vanessa has learned tolerance and compassion.

Taken together, the characters in the book comprise a cross-section of society, young and old, ne'er-do-well and solid citizen. But whatever their position in life, the characters are unfailingly real and warm and living. The people, like the depression, are here and now, living out their lives before us, and we see the depression not as a situation which existed country-wide or world-wide, but as one which affected the daily lives of individual human beings.

Vanessa herself was probably the character least affected by the depression, psychologically. As children do, she accepted the circumstances of her life without question. The economic situation is scarcely more of a problem to Uncle Dan, whose approach to life is as unrealistic as his "stage-Irish" accent. But it is a very real force in the lives of the remaining characters. Grandmother MacLeod feels its levelling influence, and resists it in characteristic fashion by refusing to acknowledge its existence. Though she would deplore the comparison, she is not unlike Uncle Dan; let others consider the ways and means, her life must go on as usual. It is a question how successful she is in blotting out the alteration in the family circumstances from her mind. Probably she is too absorbed in compensating for the loss of her son Rodney to give any serious attention to the problems of the present. Ewen's inability to supply her with the kind of service to which she felt herself entitled is just one more indication of his shortcomings. He simply cannot measure up to the standard set, in the mind of his mother, by his father and his brother; they have been taken from her and she has no choice, therefore, but to accept Ewen with all his shortcomings as a substitute, and make the best of a bad situation.

For Vanessa's father and mother the depression is very real. Their own financial problems must be faced; the doctor bill was paid in kind during the depression, if at all, and this put the doctor and his family in a position of genteel poverty. The medical profession kept its prestige, but the remuneration dwindled. If they had had only themselves to consider, the pressures would have been much less. But for them, and for Aunt Edna, the major problem is the interference in their lives which the depression forces them to tolerate. Ewen and Beth McLeod are in a position of having to cope with Ewen's mother, who considers their poverty not only distasteful but unnecessary -- the inevitable result of bad management, laziness and other modern shortcomings. In addition they are subject to the bludgeonings of Beth's father, who is himself financially secure and volubly resents those members of his family who are, through no fault of their own, dependent upon him. After Ewen's death Beth is forced into the same position as her sister Edna, both completely dependent upon their father's ungracious bounty. Edna eventually escapes into marriage, but Beth can look forward only to vicarious freedom through the lives of her children.

Grandmother Connor is insulated from the depression by her own other-worldliness, which renders the problems of the here and now either invisible or unimportant. The impact of the depression reaches her only second-hand, as it creates friction among other members of the family and involves her as a suffering witness to their disagreements.

For Grandfather Connor the depression creates problems of a different type. As the only financially secure member of the family he finds himself responsible for the support of all of the others. It isn't fair, as he repeatedly tells the world. In a sense, however, Grandfather Connor's feeling of injustice stems not from the depression, or from any of its attendant circumstances, but from his own inability to communicate with anyone, especially with members of his own family. "All he could ever come out with was anger," his son Terence says.[33] "Edna, were we always unfair to him?" Beth asks after his death, and Edna replies bluntly, "Yes, we were. . . . And he was to us, as well."[34]

It is a question to what extent the depression is responsible for the tragedy of Vanessa's cousin Chris. He is another who deals with a hostile environment by ignoring it, a device which moves one dangerously into the world of fantasy. Chris, trapped by the depression in circumstances he could not tolerate, escapes into a worse situation with pressures he cannot ignore, and slips over the brink into mental illness. Possibly the depression is wholly responsible for Chris's destruction. He possesses both the intelligence and the ambition to succeed as an engineer, but he is trapped by the depression and cannot fight his way free. His tendency toward fantasy, which eventually develops beyond his control, would probably have remained within safe limits if escape from his incompatible environment had been possible.

It is a measure of Mrs. Laurence's skill as an author that the lives of all of the characters in her book unfold naturally before us, so that it is an effort to consider the book objectively as literature. Its contents come to us in a series of vivid pictures; the pages yield up living people, so that it is only when we deliberately examine the writing that we are aware of the qualities which make the story live. The overall impression is one of unstudied simplicity, but when we examine the sentences and paragraphs we find that the simplicity itself is a part of a very sophisticated artistry. The simplicity of the language is the one consistent characteristic; otherwise the style of writing varies easily from one extreme to another, to suit the purpose of the moment. The opening paragraphs of the first story, for instance, teem with imagery, vivid imaginative imagery which provides background and atmosphere while it ostensibly describes setting.

> That house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me. Known

> to the rest of the town as "the old Connor place" and to the family as the Brick House, it was plain as the winter turnips in its root cellar, sparsely windowed as some crusader's embattled fortress in a heathen wilderness, its rooms in a perpetual gloom except in the brief height of summer. Many other brick structures had existed in Manawaka for as much as half a century, but at the time when my grandfather built his house, part dwelling place and part massive monument, it had been the first of its kind.
>
> Set back at a decent distance from the street, it was screened by a line of spruce trees whose green-black branches swept down to the earth like the sternly protective wings of giant hawks. Spruce was not indigenous to that part of the prairies. Timothy Connor had brought the seedlings all the way from Galloping Mountain, a hundred miles north, not on whim, one may be sure, but feeling that they were the trees for him. By the mid-thirties, the spruces were taller than the house, and two generations of children had clutched at boughs which were as rough and hornily knuckled as the hands of old farmers, and had swung themselves up to secret sanctuaries. On the lawn a few wild blue violets dared to grow, despite frequent beheadings from the clanking guillotine lawn mower, and mauve-flowered creeping Charley insinuated deceptively weak-looking tendrils up to the very edges of the flower beds where helmeted snapdragon stood in precision. 35

In the process of describing the brick house, the passage provides us with a fairly complete exposition for the story which is to follow. We know where the action takes place, and when, and we are subtly prepared for the belligerent nature of Grandfather Connor, and for the family atmosphere which surrounds him. It is by such subtle methods that Mrs. Laurence builds character, the old man who broods over the story throughout the book developing almost between the lines as the story progresses, understanding of his personal tragedy coming to us gradually bit by bit. The author herself never intrudes. It is as though she herself came to know these people by watching them and listening to them -- as may indeed have been the case -- and she allows them to reveal themselves to us as they did to her, in their own way, through long association. It is not the least of Mrs. Laurence's artistry that it is entirely unobtrusive.

The artistry behind the characterizations in A Bird in the House may not be obvious, but the characters themselves emerge clearly in the end. This is not true of the Bentleys in Ross's book As For Me and My House. They do not, as the people of Manawaka do, live out their lives before us; in fact we never see them directly at all. They come to us filtered through Mrs. Bentley's diary, and we have only her interpretation of their characters, and of her own motives, to work from.

It is not by accident that Mrs. Bentley has no name, for except as Philip Bentley's wife she has no existence. Although through most of the book she appears the dominant character, her every thought and action are related to him. He absorbs her whole life, and she sees this, as she does most things, clearly.

> I've left myself nothing else. I haven't been like him. I've reserved no retreat, no world of my own. I've whittled myself hollow that I might enclose and hold him, and when he shakes me off I'm just a shell. Ever since the day he let me see I was less to him than Steve I've been trying to find and live my own life again, but it's empty, unreal. 36

Even her music offers nothing.

> A few days after Christmas I sent away for some new music. . . . that I thought might start me off again -- but it just isn't in me any more. My fingers are wooden. Something's gone dead.
>
> That's what he's done to me, and there are times I can nearly hate him for it. I haven't roots of my own any more. I'm a fungus or parasite whose life depends on his. He throws me off and I dry and wither. 37

The role of the parasite is a destructive one, and there are times when Mrs. Bentley feels that the metaphor is appropriate in this sense, also.

> It always turns out the same when you make up your mind that what's right for you must be right for someone else. I made up my mind about Philip once -- and as a result see what he is today. 38

Certainly she has influenced the course of his life, deliberately as well as involuntarily. "For these last twelve years I've kept him in the Church -- no one else," she says. "The least I can do now is help him out again."39 So she is trapped in a second way; having once entered Philip's life she has not only lost her own freedom; she has usurped his. And having done so, she feels a responsibility for him.

The theme of entrapment is a unifying thread throughout the book, appearing and reappearing in many different ways. Not only does Mrs. Bentley, in her searching and prolonged analysis of their characters and their situation, emphasize it; it is the predominating imagery in the novel. Strictures, narrowness, forcible restraint -- figures of this sort are abundant. And in opposition is the imagery of escape, the struggle for freedom, frustrated flight.

The moth, fatally attracted to the flame or trapped inside the lamp chimney, is a frequently recurring symbol. Its first appearance gives us a picture of Philip which takes on significance later, when he casts off his wife.

> There's almost no wind tonight. It's hot and stuffy, and the moths are fluttering thick around the lamps. As I stood beside him he trapped one in his hand, made a puckered face and squeezed it, and then with a quick, revolted gesture tossed it into the flame. 40

Not all of the references are open to the same breadth of interpretation, but always there is the struggle for freedom. "The lamp is burning dry. There's only a little globe of light left, hollowed out of the darkness like a cage for the gray-winged moths."41

> The little moths are thick again tonight, fluttering and whirling round the lamp as if it were a hypnotist. To them, I dare say, its feeble light is just as fierce and compelling as the passions we live by. 42

Frequently the plight of the moths is tied in with the weather, both forming a background for the human struggle which is the subject of the book.

> There's the same tension in the heat tonight. It's been gathering and tightening now for weeks, and this has been the hottest, stillest day of all. It's like watching an inflated, over-distending balloon, waiting with bated breath for it to burst. Even the thud of moth wings on the lamp -- through the dense, clotted heat tonight it's like a drum. 43

As the book progresses the characters themselves are likened to trapped insects.

> The heat was heavy and suffocating. We seemed imbedded in it, like insects in a fluid that has congealed. 44

Discovering Philip's infidelity, Mrs. Bentley tells us,

> I just stood there listening a minute, a queer, doomed ache inside me, like a live fly struggling in a block of ice. 45

As the tension between them grows, the house itself becomes the cage.

> This is a small house for two people. You imagine the other to be listening. Every movement becomes furtive and strained. Then silence at last hardens over you like glass, and you feel it isn't safe to draw a breath. 46

Finally it is the all-pervading wind which serves as the stricture, the entrapment figure supplemented by a frequently recurring element of restraint. Mrs. Bentley says, "I stood against the south wall of the elevator, letting the wind nail me there."[47] Paul, finding Philip's identity as a preacher inappropriate, comments, "It's like sizing a horse up as a runner, waiting to see what he can do, and then discovering he's spavined."[48] Mrs. Bentley is conscious of it too.

> I've been sure right from the beginning -- sure that there's some twisted, stumbling power locked up within him, so blind and helpless still it can't find outlet, so clenched with urgency it can't release itself. 49

The horse appears frequently to be used as a symbol of freedom, of escape, usually frustrated. It takes Philip out of town, but only to the schoolhouse which is an extension of his cage. Philip's efforts to use it as an escape for Steve from the strictures of the town are no more successful, in spite of the careful planning.

> I find Steve bewildered by things too old for him. He reads too much, spends too much time in Philip's study. Just once I suggested he ought to be out with the other boys, getting fresh air and exercise, but Philip frowned, and said to wait until we get the horse. 50

The choice of a horse for Steve is important.

> As to the horse itself that Steve's to have, there's disagreement. Steve has his heart set on a sorrel three-year-old that Paul says is too wild and nervous for him. Philip agrees -- is afraid for Steve -- yet finds the spirited sorrel and the dashing way Steve rides him hard to resist. Laura suggests a rangy bay she sometimes rides herself, fast, but ten years old. Paul argues for another three-year-old that's shaping up well and has steady blood behind him. Stanley talks quietly about a dark brown mare called Minnie, fast enough, and thoroughly dependable. 51

The high-spirited horse, which could perhaps have offered the most complete escape from the small-town strictures, throws Steve. The choice falls upon the "thoroughly dependable" Minnie, who proves, after all, not fast enough to provide escape for Steve from the town conventions:

> Instead of riding into the country as we expected he would, he gallops up and down the streets in his cowboy outfit to show himself off. Last Saturday morning he rented out Minnie at five cents a ten-minute ride, and when he came home with his earnings and I said he must return them right away, there was a scene. Giving back the money wasn't what hurt . . . but the comedown for a dashing young cock of the walk to make a deflated reappearance as a small boy reprimanded for his precocious business enterprise. I called Philip, but frowning, he only said that since Steve had sold the rides without realizing it wasn't the right thing to do, it wasn't fair to humiliate him for it now. I agreed -- and to forestall a scandle [sic]

> over the minister's son going into the livery business, got the names from Steve and took the money back myself. 52

Earlier Mrs. Bentley herself, offered a ride on Paul's skewbald, "explained that Horizon might not approve,"[53] and later at the ranch, when she does go riding on a "quiet old horse" the expedition ends prudently when she and her escort dismount, "so I wouldn't get too stiff the first time out . . . and sat down a while like a pair of flies on an upturned mixing bowl."[54] A subsequent ride with Paul ends the same way, with the two of them sitting on the "smooth round dome of one of the hills above the river, talking for a while, then just thinking." Mrs. Bentley's thoughts are occupied in a manner which suggests anything but escape.

> I went back to the first pulpit, the first Main Street; then still farther back, to his first Main Street. . . . I went forward, too, the next pulpit and the next, the next Main Street and the next. I saw Steve grown, straining away from us, life of his own to live -- and an old, unwanted Philip straining after him. 55

The ride leads only back to the beginning once more. Escape, apparently, is not in the nature of things; the route is cyclical. The theme occurs earlier, in a comment on one of Philip's drawings.

> Another little Main Street. In the foreground there's an old horse and buggy hitched outside one of the stores. A broken old horse, legs set stolid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth, the earth it stands on, the prairie that continued where the town breaks off. What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle. 56

The horse is, throughout the novel, representative of all that is at war with Main Street. Paul comes to realize this. He is convinced, at first, that a horse is the best thing for Steve.

> "A horse," Paul said. "Give him a horse -- keep him out of the herd --" and now he turns on Philip and insists, "Let him ride with the men -- or alone. He sees enough of you. His horse will bring him home all right." 57

Later he is less sure.

> He finds himself skeptical even of his theories that a boy ought to grow up alone with a horse. "Unless he intends staying among horses. He's not much good afterwards for getting along with people." 58

He himself is uncertain, remarking once that education "separates you from the people who are really closest to you, among whom you would otherwise belong. Himself now, a ranch boy with a little schooling, he fits in nowhere."[59]

The resulting dilemma is there in the lives of all of the characters, except those who are unaware of the existence of a world beyond Horizon. The Mrs. Findleys and the Mrs. Ellingsons of the town have no wish to escape; unaware of any life outside their own small world they do not feel trapped. The people on the ranch are similarly content. They ride freely, untouched by the restrictions of Main Street. It is those who are aware of both worlds who face the tragedy. Jim Lawson's boy, who plays the piano by ear, dies as a result of injuries sustained in a runaway; Steve is thrown by the spirited sorrel, and has to settle for something less; Philip escapes for a moment into freedom with his painting of Laura's stallion, and looking at it Laura glimpses, for a moment, Philip's outside world. But Philip does not keep the painting; it is Laura's, and he returns to Main Street without it.

Any attempt to escape the conventions of Horizon's Main Street seem to be dangerous. Mrs. Bentley's solitary walks are safe, as long as they remain within the sphere of the town, but out on the ranch they are different.

> When I rounded a point and looked back and couldn't see the fire I was afraid for a minute. The close black hills, the stealthy slipping sound the river made -- it was as if I were entering dead, forbidden country, approaching the lair of the terror that destroyed the hills, that was lurking there still among the skulls. . . . I stood rooted a moment, imagining shapes in the darkness closing in on me, and then with a whole witches' Sabbath at my heels turned and made a bolt for the house. And now, an hour later, it's still a relief to look up and see the fleshy, moon-faced Hereford above my bed. 60

Nor is the danger only a figment of the imagination. Horizon, in the person of Mrs. Findley, strikes out physically at Philip when he shows signs of dissent, first through Steve and then directly. Steve suffers aches and bruises when he attempts to ride the spirited horse, and the little Lawson boy dies. Judith, too, rebels against the town and is destroyed. Possibly her fate is foreshadowed in the moth imagery of the following passage, which offers glimpses of both worlds, and suggests both the lure and the danger of the attempt to escape the conventions:

> The wind was warm and soft, like the darkness blowing past. I sat there till a

> car swung out of town and swept me with its glare. There were some youngsters in it who had had a drink too many, and slowing up they called, "Hi Lonesome -- jump in and we'll take you to a better dance. We don't like this one either."
>
> Which scared me then, and makes me feel how stale and cupboardlike and prim this little house is now. There are dusty, gray-winged moths tonight, that thud on the chimney of the lamp and glance away again with such incessant regularity that you think at last they must be worked on little springs or wires. There are six of them, and one that flew too low through the shaft of heat above the flame, and fluttered away to the floor somewhere with singed and crippled wings. 61

El Greco, the misplaced wolf hound, illustrates the conflict clearly. Like Hesse's Steppenwolf, he embodies the two incompatible elements; he stands at the edge of town answering the cries of the coyotes, acknowledging the lure of the wild while he clings to the safe haven of domesticity. When finally he yields to his instincts and ventures too far from safety, he is destroyed, just as Judith is destroyed when she ventures outside the conventional limits. The trap may be confining, but it is safe.

It is as the trap, confining, intolerable, but at the same time safer than the unknown world outside, that the prairie town of the thirties provides the ideal setting for Ross's purpose. The Bentleys reach Horizon and remain there because it offers the only security available to them. If Philip had not been an artist, if Mrs. Bentley had not been a musician, they could have been content. But aware of intellectual and aesthetic possibilities in the outside world, they felt the restrictions of Horizon. Under ordinary circumstances neither of them would have been willing to settle for the shoddy alternative their life in Horizon offered, entailing as it did the humiliating subjection to a group of individuals and a set of social and moral codes to which they could give only lip service. Under ordinary circumstances they would have struck out on another path long before the story had run its course, trusting the future to provide an alternative which could hardly be worse than the present intolerable situation. But during the thirties there was little reason to trust the future; it was a time for cautiously clinging to what you had, rather than boldly striking out in search of something better. The willingness of the Bentleys to endure the demeaning circumstances of their lives in Horizon would have indicated weakness and timidity in normal times; given the circumstances of the thirties it was not only understandable but inevitable that they would hesitate to leave, and their final rejection of their security there becomes a positive and courageous act.

The economic circumstances which bind the Bentleys to Horizon exert their pressure on the other characters as well. They, too, are caught in the economic trap, and if the church members supply the Bentleys with only a niggardly living, their own is little better. Whatever narrowness and pettiness exists in their characters is magnified by the circumstances of their lives, and even those who are by nature generous, are driven to meanness by their own tragedies.

> After service this morning at Partridge Hill a woman came up to us and said it was well to be a preacher, money to spend, not much to do, a car to drive round the country in. They won't thresh a bushel this fall. They won't have potatoes even, or feed for their chickens and pigs. It's going to be a chance, she says, for the Lord to show some of the compassion that Philip's forever talking about in his sermons. She has five children. This winter they're going to need shoes and underwear.
>
> She was a stooped, shriveled little woman. Her voice was coarse and strident. There was a look of worry and exasperation in her eyes. Some loose wisps of hair hung over her forehead, adding hopelessness.
>
> Philip's been changing of late, growing harder, more self-assertive, but today again he winced. He couldn't answer her. He just stood wetting his lips till she saw how it was with him and said, "You never mind -- I'd no right saying such things anyway." Then she put her hand on his sleeve as if he were a boy in trouble, and without looking up again hurried off to her democrat. 62

Only in a depression setting could Ross have exposed, even emphasized, the weaknesses of the prairie small-town society, while still avoiding a negative view of human nature. The atmosphere in the book is one of compassion rather than condemnation. Given the circumstances, the things the characters do and say and their treatment of each other, however reprehensible they may be in themselves, are understandable. Philip, as Mrs. Bentley explains to herself in her philosophies, is only the product of the sum total of his experiences.

> We all change and grow. We don't just happen as we are. We come by way of yesterday. Accounting for what he said tonight is the void they left when they took Steve away. And his passion for Steve, dark, strange and morbid passion that it was, accounting for that is the tangle

> of his early years, dark, strange, and morbid most of them too. 63

So with the other characters, and those most to be pitied are the narrowest and pettiest, who are themselves so confined that they are unaware of life in a circumference larger than their own.

Mrs. Bentley too is a product of her experiences, but unlike most of the other characters she is faced with no dilemma. From the beginning she has had a clarity of purpose, a single goal. Before she met Philip her goal was musical.

> Once I set myself a goal five years away, and had no great difficulty remembering or keeping faith with it. I was twelve, and had just heard the Appassionata Sonata and Chopin's Polonaise in A Flat Major. And in a cool, simple way I resolved then and there that I would learn to play them too. That same night I lay in bed and took stock of myself. Five years seemed in reason. . . . I didn't have to screw myself up to it. I said five, and I took seven. I gave a recital when I was nineteen and played them both. I look back now and think they were maybe a little premature, but it didn't matter. Philip was there that night. A friend brought him round to meet me afterwards, and from then on I had another goal. 64

Mrs. Bentley is at once a complex character, and a simple one. The complexity is all beneath the surface, a turmoil of contradictory impulses and emotions which result in the inner and outer conflicts which provide the basic structure of the plot. To avoid the eyes of Main Street she has her mail order parcels addressed to Mrs. Bird, but she ignores the town's criticism and openly continues her solitary walks down the railroad track. She examines her relationship with Philip coolly and clearly, deciding what is her best course of action, and then frequently acts, instead, on impulse. She reacts emotionally at times, ignoring prudence, and the next moment exhibits a controlled intellectual approach even in the midst of an emotional situation.

> When I touched his arm he swung round almost angrily, then took my hand and turned again to look through the window at the ugly little roofs of Horizon.
>
> I glanced up and saw a twitch to his lips. There were lines around his mouth that made him seem spent, almost broken. His hand stayed quick and strong on mine as if he wanted me there -- as if he were trying to tell me so.
>
> It was more of him than I had had in weeks, but afraid to be spendthrift with such a moment I slipped away from him again. For when he gives himself to me like that, when we come close to each other, always to follow is a sudden mustering of self-sufficiency, a repudiating swing the other way. He resents his need of me. Somehow it makes him feel weak, a little unmanly. There are times when I think he has never quite forgiven me for being just a woman.
>
> So while his hand was still warm and insistent I left him, put my hat and coat and rubbers on, walked into the town and then away from it.
>
> I had to. The house was too small, too oppressive with its faint old smell of other lives. And the little town outside was somehow too much like a mirror.
>
> Or better, like a whole set of mirrors. Ranged round me so that at every step I met the preacher's wife, splayfooted in rubbers, dowdy coat and all. I couldn't escape. The gates and doors and windows kept reminding me. 65

As always there are conflicting explanations for her conduct, too much introspection which perhaps conceals, rather than reveals, the truth. "I'm not so sure of either him or myself as I pretend," she admits finally.[66] Perhaps the real explanation for her reluctance to prolong the moment of surrender lies in her own reluctance to surrender self-sufficiency, her own resentment of being "just a woman." There is a moment when, viewing Philip's involvement with Judith, she harbours briefly the thought that she has "a right now to be free," but there is no lure to freedom on those terms. Thinking of Judith dead she realizes this.

> I'm glad she's gone — glad — for her sake as much as ours. What was there ahead of her now anyway? If I lost Philip what would there be ahead of me?[67]

However complicated may be the forces that direct her actions, her purpose is always simple and clear. Whatever is necessary to solidify her position with Philip, and to free them both from the trap, she will do. There is no agreement about her character among the critics. McCourt finds her devotion to her husband "slightly ridiculous";[68] Donald Stephens finds her "certainly smug about her awareness that Philip is a hopeless failure, a compromise."[69]

> Her relationship with her husband is very unsatisfactory -- to both of them. She appears to be constantly saying -- "Poor Philip," and by virtue of this negation, enhances her own virtuous qualities of wifehood. . . . She almost envisions herself as a goddess, all-seeing, but fearful to tell or show the reader lest he recognize yet another flaw in either herself or her husband. . . . Perhaps her major redeeming feature is her earnest desire for reconciliation with her husband, but even this raises the question of whether she is secure in her faith or merely in a blind alley with no other way out.[70]

Roy Daniels takes the opposite view:

> She is pure gold and wholly credible. Precariously she sustains an equilibrium from day to day between tough and tender mindedness, between realism close to despair and an idealism that keeps the gyroscope spinning when the pathway ahead narrows to become a mere filament across the gulf. 71

Much of the difference of opinion stems from a willingness, or unwillingness, to take Mrs. Bentley's assertions at face value, and from disagreement about her motives. I cannot wholly agree with Roy Daniels; his statement is, in my view, a contradiction in terms, for if she were, indeed, "pure gold," she could hardly be credible as a woman. But she is not, even in her own view, "pure gold." Neither do I find Donald Stephens' criticism a fair one. Smugness implies self-satisfaction, and there is ample evidence that Mrs. Bentley, however she may appreciate her own strengths, is uncomfortably aware of shortcomings and weaknesses. She is, I think, neither the saint Daniels suggests, nor the self-styled goddess of Donald Stephens. She is, as she herself suggests, "just a woman," not pure gold, but wholly credible as a human being. Like most human beings she ~~is~~ inconsistent. Like most human beings, she falls short of her own standards. She wishes she could spare Judith, "because I've gone through it, know how much it costs. She's going to find there are harder things than driving a grain team or stooking in the harvest field."72 But she invites Judith to dinner, and admits to herself,

> I think that was maybe why I asked her
> -- to watch her eyes follow him, her breathing

> quicken a little -- to look then at him, and know how completely it was wasted. My possession now is little more than nominal, but still it's more than hers; and perhaps, valuing it even more as it wears thin and crumbles, I'm not above gloating over the shadow of it that is left.
>
> Yet I'm sorry too, and would like to tell her. I don't because it would let her know how small is my own place in his life. And that's too much. Sweet and innocent and all the rest, she's nevertheless another woman. [73]

Later her treatment of Judith is ruthless. Her own suffering, at the realization that Philip's baby is not hers also, and that she must live with a constant reminder, hardens her heart.

> Her baby, always with me -- a reminder -- and Philip in return to think it only a fortunate coincidence that the baby I wanted should be his. I looked ahead and the prospect brought bitterness. I felt my blood go thick and my lips set and hard and cruel.
>
> I told him he must make her understand that once we take the baby she is never to see it again -- that she is never to see even me. I want it to be my baby -- my son. I won't let her remind me that it isn't. "Make it clear to her," I said, "that she can't refuse. Tell her that we can give her child opportunity and a name. Tell her how he will suffer if she keeps him, grow up and eventually hate her. You tell her, or I will." [74]

Mrs. Bentley speaks out of her own pain, but there is no excuse for Philip's callous rejoinder, if we are to take it at face value.

> He sat stirring his coffee a minute and biting his lip, then said, "Yes, but later. They say it makes a difference to the child what the mental condition of the mother is before it's born -- and since it's to be our child --" [75]

Either he is entirely heartless, in his determination to

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possess the child, or he thinks she is, and is stalling for time. In the light of this conversation, Mrs. West's words after Judith's death become bitterly ironic. "You and your husband are good people. You're good Christians, and I'm glad you're taking the baby." Mrs. Bentley makes no comment, and her unmoved acceptance of Judith's death does her no credit. "It's what I've secretly been hoping for all along," she admits, apparently without embarrassment. "It's easier for me."[76] Her suggestion that she is glad for Judith's sake as well appears, in the light of what has gone before, something less than convincing.

The Bentleys appear otherwise to be compassionate individuals, sensitive to the problems of others. Their callousness in this instance may be explained, if not excused, by the fact that the baby has become for both of them a ticket to freedom. Plan and save how she will, Mrs. Bentley cannot rescue them without Philip's help, and it has become apparent that he will do for a son what he will not do for his wife. Without the baby there lies ahead of them only an endless succession of Main Streets, and a continuation of the small town and domestic pressures which have become unbearable. If they are to survive they must escape, and in their struggle for freedom, compassion for Judith is lost. The fact that Philip will do for Steve, or for his own son, what he will not do for his wife, throws some light on the marriage relationship. Both are artists, creators. Philip, inept in the presence of his competent wife, asserts himself in his attempt to mold Steve in his own image. Perhaps in the presence of a more malleable wife, he would have been equally assertive. It may be that the barrier between them is not one of difference, but of similarity. Both have the instincts of the potter, but neither is willing to be molded by the other.

The baby, tiny and helpless, is being drawn into a situation which offers only the dimmest of prospects for his future. Mrs. Bentley could give Steve "only a twisted, hybrid love." "Philip is spoiling him thoroughly," she says. "I ought to protest, but I'm too small and selfish. However much Steve begins to mean to me, Philip means more."[77] Philip himself seems no more promising as a parent. A son is important to him, evidently, not as a separate individual, important in his own right, but rather as a duplicate of himself, a second Philip in whom the first one can live a second time, profiting from the lessons the first Philip has learned. Yet there are indications finally that the baby himself will work his alchemy, once the Bentleys are free of the trap and no longer threatened.

> He's a very small boy yet, mostly lungs and diapers, but we like him. Philip just stands and looks and looks at him, and puts his cheek down close to the little hands, and tells me that way how much I must forget.[78]

If this is a new goal, perhaps the baby's prospects will improve.

The image of the depression as a trap, which predominates in Ross's novel, seems to be the underlying symbol in most of the prairie depression novels. Vera Lysenko's farm women bemoan their inability to escape to greener pastures. Patricia Blondal stresses the immobility of the "long open-eyed sleep." Neil Fraser is "chained" to life on an unproductive farm. The strictures which bind Margaret Laurence's characters are basically economic. Captivity affects different people in different ways; some struggle for freedom, some find their bonds intolerable and yield to mental or physical destruction, some accept their position philosophically and await release. These are the reactions we find among those who were victims of the depression. The circumstances of the thirties are the same wherever we find the period described. The reactions vary with the individual character, but together they form a predictable pattern, not significantly different from the pattern of human response to any other major crisis.

As material for literature, however, the depression differs from more dramatic and exciting calamities such as war. It was a slower moving tragedy, encroaching upon the lives of its victims little by little, exerting its influence by small degrees over a long period of time. The literature it generated, therefore, tends to be thoughtful and philosophical rather than dramatic. For the writer who was interested in studying the reactions of the human being under prolonged pressure, the depression provided good material. It is in this area that the best prairie depression literature has been produced.

When we have finished our examination of the literature, what have we found? There are broad general areas of experience shared by all regions of the country, and by all countries. The problems are the same, the emphasis differs. Poverty, unemployment, political unrest are general, whether we look at the literature of east or west, of Canada, the United States or Britain. The struggle between Communism and Fascism is a political concern in all three countries, but it loses emphasis as we move from Britain to the United States, and from the United States to Canada. In Canada, as we approach the prairies, there is a vital change in the nature of political concerns. The problems of international politics almost disappear, and unrest with domestic political policies, which broods in the background in other areas, becomes increasingly important.

Unemployment and the poverty and social dislocation which it causes are a second major concern, giving rise, except on the prairies, to the bulk of the American literature. Even in Britain, where most of the attention is focused on politics, we have a good deal of comment on the sufferings of the unemployed. The transient receives major coverage in American literature, and although he is more characteristic of the new world than the old, finds his way into the work of Orwell and Monsarrat as well. Here he is transient, not in search of work, but only because the law makes it necessary for him to keep moving in order to find shelter.

In American literature the transient shares the centre of the stage with the industrial worker. The struggle between labor and management, which as we have seen began before the depression in Britain, was a new and vital part of American depression life. In Canada the unemployment problem is major, but labor relations appear only incidentally in one or two books.

When we reach the agricultural west, all of these issues are dwarfed by the overpowering influence of the drought. This is the singular circumstance which makes the depression literature of the prairies unique. In no other part of the world, only in the plainsarea of Canada and the United States, was drought a factor in the depression. In these areas it was the very foundation of the tragedy, vitally affecting the economics, the politics, the sociology, the philosophy, the human life of the decade.

Out of the drought come two major symbols, which dominate the literature of the prairies. First, the dust, a symbol of all of the forces with which the prairie people had to contend, of all of the dark, smothering forces of human life. For the prairie farmer it is his traditional enemy-ally the weather, this time using his own land as a weapon to defeat him. There is nothing supernatural about it. It is a natural phenomenon, a particularly unfriendly and violent manifestation of nature itself, to be tolerated, endured, until the mood changes. For those who lack affinity with the land, the dust is an alien monster, malignant, overpowering. It cannot be overcome, but it may be escaped. So the second symbol arises: Peace River Country, the green and watered land where gardens blossom and troubles fade into obscurity, a haven from all of the evil forces represented by the dust. The exact location differs with the circumstances. It may be Peace River, or Meadow Lake, or Rolling Hills, or a little place at the coast, or even a small bookstore in the city. But always it is a refuge from the dusty violence of the prairies, always peaceful, green, cool, remote. Reached, it loses its symbolism; dreamed about, it remains the Promised Land, spoken of wistfully, praised by those who have seen it, and "a lot further from here than most people think."

What was the effect of the depression on human life? There is no one answer in the literature or in the reminiscences. The strong endured and developed; the weak collapsed. The unfortunate suffered; the fortunate did not. Those who had a sense of humour used it to lighten their days; the chronic complainers found no lack of material. Braithwaite says it was the time when we left our childhood behind.[79] King says it "proved that happiness and wholesome pleasures could be had at little monetary cost,"[80] and the statement is echoed by several other writers.

Among people who lived through the depression, among people who wrote imaginatively about it, there is no agreement. It is the old story of the blind men and the elephant: the sum of the parts does not comprise any recognizable whole.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1] Experimentation in search of new strains of high-grade hard wheat that would mature early enough to overcome the west's short growing season produced in the 1890's, first Red Fife, and then Marquis in 1910, which was for many years the basis of the wheat production on the prairies. Douglas Hill, The Opening of the Canadian West (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 242.

[2] League for Social Reconstruction, Pioneers in Poverty (Winnipeg, 1938), pp. 5-6.

[3] George Britnell, The Wheat Economy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1939), p. 71.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1] Arthur Lendrum's article, "On Relief" (*Macleans*, April 1, 1933, p. 41) describes an experience which must have been typical of a first visit to the relief office by a white collar worker accustomed to financial independence. See also James Gray's account in *The Winter Years*, discussed here pp. 294 ff.

[2] Depression conditions in Canada reflected a similar decline in world economic activity, but Canada appears to have been more severely affected than most other countries. See A. E. Safarian, *The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression* (1959; rpt., Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p. 1. See also Britnell, *The Wheat Economy*, pp. 71-73 & p. 78.

[3] As a result of "fixed railway rates, high protective tariffs and an economically vicious system of administered prices . . . the farmer found that the price of wheat fell more than twice as far as the price of things he must buy." (Ibid., pp. 78-9).

[4] Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1973), p. 2.

[5] During the period from 1929 to 1937 the Saskatchewan government estimated its relief expenditures in excess of $110,500,000 -- more than the total ordinary revenue of the province for the same period. (*Pioneers in Poverty*, p. 29). Alberta and Manitoba, less dependent on a single crop and less drought stricken, suffered proportionately less, except in the larger cities where the migrant unemployed congregated. In 1937 it was estimated that nearly 10,000 fully employable persons in the prairie provinces were without jobs, and of these more than 1500 were young people who had never been gainfully employed. (Ibid., p. 30). The situation in major prairie cities was deplorable, with more than 10% of the thousands of families receiving relief living in one room, and an additional 24% in two rooms. (Ibid., p. 33).

[6] Figures are not exact, and vary from district to district, but surveys conducted by the Saskatchewan Agricultural Research Foundation indicated that probably not more than 5% of Saskatchewan farmers were free from debt. (Britnell, The Wheat Economy, p. 82). Various government measures for the postponement and adjustment of farm debt -- the Debt Adjustment Act of 1933, the Civil Rights Act of 1933, debt postponement legislation of 1931 -- served only to delay the collection of debt, and resulted in no real lessening of the burden. The Farmers' Creditors Arrangement Act of 1934, and a 1936 agreement with the Dominion Mortgage and Investment Association, together with government cancellation of relief indebtedness and tax arrears in certain drought areas, and a lowering of interest rates and easing of payment of regulations in the rest of the province, brought some relief. Debt still remained overpowering, however, especially in view of crop and price conditions. Before 1931 about 70% of farms in Saskatchewan and Manitoba were mortgage free and operated by owners; by 1936 only a third of the farms in Manitoba and 17% of the farms in Saskatchewan were mortgage free. Farm debt in Manitoba in 1936 was estimated at 65% of the total value of farm land. (Pioneers in Poverty, pp. 12-13).

[7] The problem was accentuated in large cities, and in western areas where drought was an added complication. Food relief in Saskatchewan cities increased from about $30,000 in 1927 to over $1,500,000 in 1936. Agricultural aid in the province increased proportionately. In 1937 it was estimated that two out of every five persons in rural Saskatchewan were on relief. (Ibid., p. 31). Nor do the relief statistics and unemployment figures tell the whole story.

> The full extent of misery is not disclosed by a study of unemployment statistics. Among those classified as employed, there are many in receipt of wages so low that their condition is worse than if they were actually on relief. For example, in Winnipeg there were 9,294 wage earners not on relief who received from $1 to $449 for the twelve months ending June 1, 1936. Again, short-time workers are not classed as unemployed, and yet are suffering inhuman hardships in a vain attempt to live on a few weeks' work. In 1936, 49% of those classified as employed in Manitoba worked only part time. Approximately one-third of these worked less than 28 weeks of that year. Similar proportions are shown for

Alberta and Saskatchewan. In addition, there are a great many persons who might well apply for relief but remain a heavy burden on some other wage-earner in the family, rather than take this dreaded step. Obviously, this results in a serious reduction of their standard of living. In Winnipeg alone, there were 2,292 persons not on relief who did not earn one cent during the year ending June 1, 1926. (Ibid., p. 33).

[8] One teacher reports in conversation receiving a pair of shoes as her total salary for a year's work. See also Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years, pp. 3, 4, 5.

[9] See pp. 137-38 & 143-44.

[10] The newspapers report protest parades and riots of the jobless in Saskatoon and Calgary during the summer of 1935, and sporadic unrest among the single unemployed is reported periodically across Canada. The news reports themselves, confined of necessity to fact, tell little about the mental and emotional climate of the time, but the editorials and letters to the editor give us glimpses behind the scenes. Even discounting the political angle -- the Liberals, of course, as well as the C.C.F., seized the opportunity to point out the shortcomings of the Bennett government -- it is apparent that the general public was strongly sympathetic to the cause of the strikers. Certainly not even the most ardent Conservative could deny that the whole affair was badly bungled by the federal authorities. It is doubtful, however, whether even the most intelligent approach by Ottawa could have kept the sympathies of the West. Traditionally the westerner resents the domination of the East and complains, justly or unjustly, that the special problems of the prairies are not appreciated by the federal government. Add to this the fact that the prairies were experiencing their own private depression brought on by the drought, as well as the general economic problems of the country, and that the measures taken so far to combat the depression had benefited the industrialists at the expense of agriculture, and it is apparent that the strikers would have had to be without a cause, or to have taken some positive unpopular action, in order to alienate the public. The strikers themselves, however, seem to have been orderly and disciplined. They were young, mainly, many of them prairie boys from farms and small towns, and the wives and mothers from the towns and cities through which they passed had been in close personal contact with them, providing food and comforts with traditional prairie hospitality. Relations with the general public were good up

until the time of the riot, and the high-handed manner in which the federal authorities by-passed the provincial government and assumed control of the forces of law in the province -- an action publicly labelled unconstitutional by the Saskatchewan government -- tended to offset any resentment resulting from the violence and destruction of the riot. The Leader-Post editorial condemning the conduct of the affair by federal authorities (July 2, 1935) must have met with the approval of the majority of its Saskatchewan readers.

> The point emerges, as it has so often emerged in connection with Mr. Bennett, that he was too busy himself to give the situation the serious consideration that it required and that he did not regard any other member of his Cabinet as competent to deal with the matter.
>
> Because of the fact that Ottawa had decided that the strikers were to be stopped in Saskatchewan and that issue of law and order was almost certain to arise on Saskatchewan ground, the ordinary citizen would take it for granted that the Saskatchewan Government would have been notified of what was proposed. Such notification would have been based in the ordinary canons of common sense and courtesy. Nothing of the kind was done. The Dominion Government went on in its blundering way until a bad situation that should have been attended to in British Columbia was made worse on the plains of Saskatchewan. And Mr. Bennett, having made all the moves to place the problem on Saskatchewan's doorstep and having taken over the matter of police administration in Saskatchewan without question or without notification, now comes forward to suggest that the Government of Saskatchewan should do its duty!

A reader whose letter appears on the same page comments on the conduct of the marchers and their leaders:

> The very evident splendid conduct of the men who have shown such fortitude and self-control here in Regina and elsewhere in the course of the march, show that their leaders who have disciplined such a mass of varied consciousness must have personally developed a large degree of moral courage and self-control to thus be able to control so many followers who are in such strenuous conditions, and influence them to a man.

> There is shown through these evident facts displayed by the whole army of marchers under these leaders the earnest and sincere effort of a 'better self' that appeals to and impresses the better self of their followers. . . . It also appeals to and impresses the better self of the public wherever the marchers make a stay. In Regina we have had the marchers many days, and the quality of their conduct remains good. (Annie E. Inglis.)

An Edmonton Journal editorial (July 2, 1935) deplores the lack of tact with which Mr. Bennett met the deputation from the strikers.

> There was no occasion for his dwelling on the fact that only one member of the delegation was born in Canada or for referring to the charge on which this man had been convicted. Their places of birth make no difference, so long as they are Canadians now, while the raking up of the past of the leader of the movement was not likely to lessen his influence among his followers. As for the Premier's statement that work was the last thing that his visitors wanted, it was not at all liable to make them any more disposed to do as he wished.

While the Regina riot attracted more notice than many other activities of the unemployed, probably because of the death of Police Sergeant Charles Millar, it was neither the beginning nor the end of the strike controversy. The Saskatoon riot on November 1, 1932, was taken much more lightly by the press, though it was similar in many respects. It was reported on a purely local level, and the melodramatic command of Chief Donald of the Saskatoon Police Force, "Police, draw your truncheons!" provided a basis for much facetious comment and was quoted under the "daily Stardoms" the next day as "Famous First Words." Even after the Regina riots had ended in the orderly return of the strikers to their homes or camps, unrest and strike activity among the unemployed continued to be reported. The July 6 issue of the Star-Phoenix pictures the arrival in Saskatoon of the relief camp strikers from Regina, the caption reading:

> A huge banner 'Abolish Slave Camps' was strung on one of the coaches bearing relief camp strikers from Regina that arrived at Saskatoon at 5:40 o'clock Friday afternoon. At Regina 530 boarded the train for the north,

> 29 alighting at Dundurn camp and 71 here. In commenting on the riot they said they wished all of the 1500 strikers had been at the meeting Dominion Day so they could have presented a united front to the police.

The lead editorial comments:

> The conflict was unexpected. The situation seemed to have reached and passed its climax last Wednesday when the men decided not to force the issue and defy authority by attempting to board a train in the face of a powerful police force. . . . That process of dispersing seemed to have begun but it could not be expected to assume very large proportions as long as the men had funds. When their funds expired, then the crowd in Regina would have quickly disappeared. That would have been a matter only of days, for the citizens of Regina certainly would not have supported them by contributions for very long.

Although charges of Communist domination of the strikers and marches in Canada are found in Bennett's attacks on the strike leaders, both the C.C.F. and the general public discount the effect of Communist agitation, and the newspapers make virtually no mention of it. In letters to J.S. Woodsworth, June 12 and 15, 1935, M. J. Coldwell outlines his attitude:

> We expect to have the trekkers from B.C. here early tomorrow and from inquiries we have made we have learned that they are a very fine bunch of young men who are not showing any connections of a Communist sort. Undoubtedly there are some Communists among them but as far as we are able to discover, a large percentage of them are B.C. C.C.F. supporters . . . From what I have been able to learn the 'man on the street' in the cities so far visited has been won over to them by their gentlemanly bearing. . . .
>
> The men who have arrived here, some 1,700 in number, are well behaved, well disciplined and apparently of a very fine type on the whole. Our local organizations both in Calgary and Regina have cooperated to the fullest extent. . . . In many respects we have taken the lead. There have been no difficulties except of course in so far as one or two of them (the Communists) have

> endeavored to take the entire credit for organizing and conducting this trek. Among the men there are several Communists who are conducting themselves in a manner which is earning the respect of those of us who are associated in this work.
>
> At the big rally in the Stadium last evening which was attended by some 7,000 citizens, we had platform speakers representing the C.C.F., Communist Party, the United Church of Canada, Local Women and the Roman Catholic Church. . . . The Liberal and Conservative authorities were also invited to send speakers but did not do so. . . .
>
> Michiel Horn, ed., The Dirty Thirties (Canada: Copp Clark, 1972), pp. 351-52.

Sympathy for Regina's situation comes from even such an unexpected quarter as the Toronto Globe editorial page:

> All Canada is wondering why Regina has been obliged to entertain unexpected and unwanted guests. Its citizens do not deny a reputation for true western hospitality, but they regard this visitation as an abuse of hospitality. They did not welcome the coming, but they are ready to speed the parting guests. And the question in Regina now is, "When will the railways announce excursion rates to the coast similar to those that enabled the marchers to reach the interior of the west country." (July 3, 1935.)

The unrest was not confined to the west, or even to Canada. The Star-Phoenix, on July 19, 1935, reports that marchers in Manitoba voted unanimously to continue the march to Ottawa, in spite of an offer of free transportation back to Winnipeg from Kenora, Ontario. Public support was apparently still available. At a public meeting in Kenora, sanctioned by the mayor, a crowd of over 1000 is reported to have contributed funds in excess of $50 to the cause. The police and the Ontario government are reported as taking a surprisingly "gentle attitude" to the march, in view of the fact that a previous march in Quebec had been halted by police, with 21 arrests, at Vaudreuil. The Winnipeg contingent, on the other hand, appears to have been escorted by R.C.M.P. Side by side with the Kenora report, the Star-Phoenix reports a protest march in Paris, where marchers protesting pay cuts were charged by police, "numbers cut down" and "agitators under arrest." Red domination is openly charged by the Paris newspapers.

[11] Arthur Lower, *Canadians in the Making* (Toronto: Longman's Green, 1958), p. 177.

[12] Norah Story, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 445.

[13] *The History of Rolling Hills*, 1939-64, (No publisher, n.d.)

NOTES

CHAPTER II

[1] Nicholas Monsarrat, This is the Schoolroom (1939; rpt., London: Pan, 1970), p. 261.

[2] Ibid., p. 139.

[3] Robin Skelton, (ed.), Poetry of the Thirties (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 46.

[4] Ibid., p. 55.

[5] Edward Upward, In the Thirties (London: Heinemann, 1962), pp. 201-2.

[6] George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (1937; rpt., N.Y.: Harcourt Brace, 1958), p. xviii.

[7] Skelton, Poetry of the Thirties, p. 113.

[8] Julian Symons, The Thirties (London: Cressett press, 1960), p. 51.

[9] Skelton, Poetry of the Thirties, p. 50.

[10] Ibid., p. 62.

[11] Josephine Herbst, The Executioner Waits (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace, 1933) pp. 214-15.

[12] Ibid., p. 241.

[13] Ibid., p. 226.

[14] Ibid., p. 326.

[15] Feike Feikema, The Golden Bowl (St. Paul: Webb, 1934), pp. 130-32.

[16] Ibid., pp. 222-23.

[17] The Atlantic Monthly, 157 (May, 1936), pp. 540-51.

[18] The farmer's faith in the land, and his emotional involvement with it, is examined in James Gray's Men Against the Desert, discussed here p. 269.

[19] John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (1939; rpt., N.Y.: Bantam, 1954), pp. 26-7.

[20] The situation was apparently not left behind with the depression. A New York news dispatch recently reported that a couple driven from their home because they could not pay the rent, were refused welfare assistance because they had no fixed address. (Edmonton Journal, June 5, 1971, p. 27.)

[21] Canadian Forum, Vol. XIV, No. 161, Feb., 1934, p. 177.

[22] Morley Callaghan, Such Is My Beloved (1934; rpt., Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 127.

[23] Claudius Gregory, Forgotten Men (Hamilton: Davis-Lisson, 1933), p. 40.

[24] Ibid., p. 282.

[25] Ibid., p. 284.

[26] Hugh MacLennan, The Watch that Ends the Night (1959; rpt., N.Y.: Signet, n.d.), p. 224.

[27] Ibid., p. 251.

[28] Ibid., p. 252.

[29] Ibid., p. 150.

[30] Ibid., p. 227.

[31] Ibid., p. 213.

[32] Ibid., p. 268.

[33] Ibid., pp. 222-23.

[34] Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Collins, 1945), p. 274.

[35] *Forum*, Vol. XII, No. 140, May, 1932, p. 290.

[36] *Forum*, Vol. XV, No. 174, March, 1935, p. 220.

[37] *Forum*, Vol. XVI, No. 194, March, 1937, p. 23.

[38] Earle Birney, *Down the Long Table* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1955), pp. 19-20.

[39] Ibid., pp. 65-7.

[40] Ibid., pp. 260-62.

[41] Ted Allan, *This Time a Better Earth* (N.Y.: William Morrow, 1939), pp. 5-6.

[42] John Moss, *Patterns of Isolation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), pp. 211-12.

[43] Hugh Garner, *Cabbagetown* (1950; rpt., Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 200.

[44] Ibid., pp. 372-73.

[45] Ibid., p. 272.

[46] Ibid., p. 385.

[47] Ibid., pp. 383-84.

[48] Ibid., p. 414.

[49] *Forum*, Vol. XVII, No. 199, August, 1937, p. 159.

[50] For an account of Dr. Bethune's involvement in Spain see Ted Farah, "Canada's Blood Trust in Spain," *Canadian Magazine*, August, 1937, p. 23. See also Ted Allen & Sydney Gordon, *The Scalpel, The Sword; The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1952). Also Roderick Stewart, *Bethune* (Toronto: New Press, 1973).

[51] *Forum*, Vol. XVII, No. 197, June, 1937, p. 118. Quoted also in *The Scalpel, The Sword*, p. 107.

[52] *Forum*, Vol. XVII, No. 197, June, 1937, p. 118.

[53] MacLennan, *Two Solitudes*, pp. 269-70.

[54] Ibid., p. 303.

[55] Ibid., p. 313.

[56] Ibid., p. 323.

[57] Ibid., p. 289.

[58] Ibid., p. 311.

[59] Ibid., p. 274.

[60] Callaghan, *Such is My Beloved*, p. 129.

[61] Ibid., p. 131.

[62] Ibid., pp. 134-36.

[63] Ibid., p. 101.

[64] Ibid., p. 127.

[65] *Forum*, Vol. XV, No. 174, March, 1935, p. 220.

[66] Garner, *Cabbagetown*, p. 71.

[67] Ibid., p. 142.

[68] Ibid., p. 143.

[69] *Forum*, Vol. XIII, No. 145, Oct., 1932, p. 10.

[70] *Forum*, Vol. XIV, No. 159, Dec. 1933, p. 93.

[71] *Forum*, Vol. XV, No. 180, Jan., 1936, p. 24.

[72] MacLennan, *Two Solitudes*, p. 321.

[73] Ibid., p. 281.

[74] MacLennan, *The Watch that Ends the Night*, pp. 5-6.

[75] Ibid., pp. 98-9.

[76] Ibid., pp. 114-15.

[77] Ibid., p. 109.

[78] *Forum*, Vol. XIII, No. 156, Sept. 1933, p. 461.

[79] *Forum*, Vol. XVI, No. 192, Jan., 1937, p. 26.

[80] *Forum*, Vol. XVII, No. 201, Oct., 1937, p. 242.

[81] *The Canadian Bookman*, Vol. XXI, No. 3, August-September, 1939, p. 9.

[82] Garner, *Cabbagetown*,pp. 133-34.

[83] Ibid., p. 135.

[84] Ibid., p. 136.

[85] Gabrielle Roy, *The Tin Flute* (1947; rpt., Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1969), pp. 107-8.

[86] Ibid., pp. 109-10.

[87] Ibid., pp. 102-3.

[88] Ibid., p. 227.

[89] Ibid., pp. 221-23.

[90] Ibid., pp. 268-69.

[91] Ibid., p. 274.

[92] Dorothy Livesay, Selected Poems, 1926-56 (Toronto: Ryerson, 1957), p. 74.

[93] Ibid., p. 92.

NOTES

Chapter III

[1] Robert Wylie Rodgers, Dry Belt Jingles (Cabin Lake., Alta.: Rodgers, n.d.), pages unnumbered.

[2] Calgary Herald, July 16, 1934.

[3] Edna Jaques, Drifting Soil (Moose Jaw: Times, 1934), p. 12.

[4] Saskatchewan Farmer, January 2, 1933, p. 5.

[5] Statistics quoted in the issue of February 22, 1936.

[6] Edna Jaques, "Briercrest," Maclean's, October 15, 1934, p. 48.

[7] Toronto: MacMillan, 1938.

[8] W. J. Mather, "The Trek to Meadow Lake," Maclean's, April 1, 1932, pp. 15 ff.

[9] Ibid., p. 49.

[10] See James Gray's account in Men Against the Desert, pp. 198-202.

[11] Wilfred Egglestone, "Drought Drama," Maclean's, Jan. 1, 1935, pp. 14 ff.

[12] H. G. L. Strange, "Dried But Not Out," Maclean's, Jan. 1, 1935, pp. 26 ff.

[13] Ralph Allen, Ordeal by Fire (N.Y.: Popular Library, 1961), p. 291.

[14] Ibid., p. 297.

[15] G. B. Ferguson, "An Alberta Prophet, -- 1935 Model," Canadian Forum, April, 1935, pp. 245-48.

[16] April 24, 1937, Vol. 1, No. 1. Subsequent quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the same issue.

[17] "Aberhart's perversion of that theory has been denounced as false by the leading Social Creditors of the world, including Major Douglas, and more recently by many of Aberhart's own hand-picked members of the Alberta legislature." Ibid.

[18] "The Rebel wants you to understand, Mr. Premier, that this publication was not launched in a spirit of malice or personal animosity toward you. We want you to know that the step was taken only after long and serious and, yes, prayerful consideration.

You, personally, enter into the picture only insofar as you are, personally, the representation of the evil which it is our desire to attack. There is no malice or hatred toward you personally; but we do hate, with all our heart and soul and mind, your lying, your slandering, your blaspheming, your wilful deceptions, your boycotting, your threats and intimidations. We hate and despise the methods you employed to gain power. If you had won a fair fight by honest and honorable methods, we would respect and honor you. But you insinuated yourself into power by the lowest form of deception ever practiced in the political history of Canada. You gained power by using the highest and noblest thing in life -- religion -- to appeal to the lowest -- to greed, selfishness, cupidity. By using this fiendish combination, you set loose an uncontrollable flood of passion. You set neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend, brother against brother, man against wife. And then you crucified a suffering people upon the cross of your vanity and ambition." Ibid.

[19] Zubick's comments throughout the series of publications are equally forthright. He cites instances and produces quotations to show how Aberhart and his associates have contradicted themselves, misled the public and failed to honor their promises. His attack is so direct and his language so explicit that his statements must have been either true or libellous, but apparently they went unchallenged. Unchallenged, but apparently not ignored, for the issue of November 5, 1937, carries the following open letter to Premier Aberhart:

> "Sir:
>
> You have repeatedly stated of late that this 'calling of names,' abuse, knocking, etc., should cease. That you have not taken your own advice to heart for yourself is beside the point. We agree, and we are sure that all good citizens agree, that this mutual vilification should cease. It is a sad state of affairs indeed when the premier of a province is openly referred to as a liar, scoundrel, double-crosser, blasphemer, etc., and yet all he does to meet the serious charges against him is to reply by calling his accusers such names as howling dogs, vicious rowdies, rats, liars, sons of Satan, tool of the financiers, enemies, etc.
>
> What about having a show-down?
>
> You are in a position where, if you were not guilty of the serious accusations against you, you could, and *should* take appropriate action to silence your critics. In fact, you have promised that you would 'take these vicious creatures in hand' to put a stop to their 'barking and biting.'" (p. 1.)

[20] Zubick was not silenced. *The Rebel* died a natural death on schedule. In the final issue, January 7, 1938, Zubick reminds his readers that the publication was begun as an experiment, and that he had undertaken to publish twelve issues. "This is No. 12, and with it *The Rebel* leaves the scene." Financially, he says, he has just about broken even, and since the paper was not launched as a money-making venture, he considers the financial outcome as distinctly favorable.

The main objective of the paper, he says, was to shift attention "from the pointless squabbling over 'social credit' to frank exposure and condemnation of Aberhart's trickery, dishonesty and cowardice." Aberhart, he says, is no longer "the cocksure, arrogant popular idol of the masses, but the pitiable object of public contempt and scorn." (p. 8). While *The Rebel* cannot take full credit for this, "it penetrated to every corner of the province, and it may not be presumptuous to suggest that it at least helped in some small measure in forming and perhaps hastening crystallization of this sentiment." The objective has, at any rate, been achieved. "Therefore, as *The Rebel* came into being for no other specific purpose than that which has been accomplished, it should and does herewith retire." (p. 8).

[21] "One of the strikingly significant facts only now coming to proper recognition is that throughout the

entire period of wild fanaticism in the province during the past few years, practically every weekly newspaper of Alberta has remained uninfected by the poisonous virus of Aberhartism. We understand that only two or three weeklies fell in behind Aberhart. The vast majority, however, declined to be fooled by the magic of the Great Delusionist, and in the fact of hostile opposition, boycott and general ingratitude, they stuck to their guns." (April 24, Vol. 1, No. 1. p. 1.)

[22] The parody works its way through the entire alphabet.

[23] *Alice in Blunderland* (Legislative Buildings, Edmonton: Social Credit Board, 1941), pp. 2 ff.

[24] The election issue of the *Edmonton Journal*, August 23, 1935, remarks editorially that it can be "no news that we regret the outcome of the election," and presumably as a challenge to the newly elected government, reprints the election promises which it is now committed to implement. The same issue contains an article, however, which deplores the fact that Mayor McGeer of Vancouver, unpopular because of some kind of trouble in Vancouver in connection with the relief camp strikers there, was prevented from speaking at Drumheller during the election campaign. The article points out that Communists sometimes get the same treatment, and concludes with the assertion that "every candidate, regardless of party affiliation, is entitled to a courteous hearing," a reminder which is in itself indicative of the turbulence of the political scene.

[25] Margaret Laurence, "Horses of the Night," *A Bird in the House* (1963; rpt., Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974).

[26] Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel* (1964; rpt., Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968), p. 180.

[27] Ibid., p. 181.

[28] Edward McCourt, *Music at the Close* (1947; rpt., Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968), p. 138.

[29] Ibid., p. 183.

[30] Garner, *Cabbagetown*, pp. 175-76.

[31] Ibid., p. 183.

[32] Roderick Haig-Brown, On the Highest Hill (Toronto: Collins, 1949), p. 163.

[33] Ibid., p. 170.

[34] Ibid., p. 171.

[35] Ibid., p. 165.

[36] Ibid., p. 167.

[37] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, p. 56.

[38] Harry Boyle, The Great Canadian Novel (Toronto: Doubleday, 1972), p. 67.

[39] Ibid., p. 69.

[40] Ibid., p. 70.

[41] National Film Board, The Drylanders, 1949. Script not available. This, and all subsequent quotations, are taken from the sound track. Notation for subsequent quotations is therefore omitted.

[42] Irene Baird, Waste Heritage (Toronto: MacMillan, 1939), p. 6.

[43] Ibid., pp. 224-25.

[44] W. O. Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind (1947; rpt., Toronto: MacMillan, 1966), pp. 65-6.

[45] Ibid., p. 171.

[46] Wiebe, Rudy, ed., Stories from Western Canada, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1972), p. 81.

[47] See Barry Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years 1929-1939 (Toronto: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 67-79.

[48] Smith, A. J. M., ed., The Book of Canadian Poetry (Toronto: Gage, 1943), p. 351.

[49] Robert Kroetsch, *The Words of My Roaring* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), p. 42.

[50] Ibid., pp. 45-6.

[51] Ibid., pp. 76-8.

[52] *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, p. 349.

[53] Sinclair Ross, *As For Me and My House* (1941; rpt., Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1957), p. 39.

[54] Ibid., p. 73.

[55] Ibid., p. 120.

[56] Ibid., p. 50.

[57] Gwen Pharis Ringwood, "Still Stands the House," *Thought and Expression*, ed., H. T. Coutts et. al., (N.Y.: Longmans Green, 1958), p. 289.

[58] Margaret Laurence, "The Sound of Singing," *A Bird in the House*, p. 33.

[59] Ibid., p. 35.

[60] Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, p. 118.

[61] Ibid., p. 119.

[62] Laurence, *Stone Angel*, p. 168.

[63] Ibid., pp. 169-70.

[64] Ross, *As For Me and My House*, p. 106.

[65] Kroetsch, *The Words of My Roaring*, p. 6.

[66] Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, pp. 45-6.

[67] Ibid., p. 49.

[68] Ibid., p. 175.

[69] Ibid., p. 153.

[70] Patricia Blondal, A Candle to Light the Sun (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960), pp. 47-8.

[71] McCourt, Music at the Close, pp. 147-48.

[72] Ibid., pp. 153-56.

[73] Ibid., pp. 180-81.

[74] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, pp. 7-8.

[75] Ibid., pp. 31 ff.

[76] McCourt, Music at the Close, p. 179.

[77] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, p. 97.

[78] McCourt, Music at the Close, p. 181.

[79] Thomas Saunders, Horizontal World, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1951), p. 27.

[80] Stanley McMullen, "Grove and the Promised Land," Writers of the Prairies, ed., Donald Stephens (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1972), p. 67.

[81] Ibid., p. 68.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., p. 72.

[84] Ibid., p. 73.

[85] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, p. 80.

[86] Vera Lysenko, Westerly Wild (Toronto: Ryerson, 1956), p. 6.

[87] For first-hand comments on dust and drought see Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years, pp. 36-43.

[88] McCourt, Music at the Close, p. 177.

[89] Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, p. 189.

[90] Ibid., p. 185.

[91] Laurence, Stone Angel, p. 168.

[92] Watson Kirkconnell, The Flying Bull and Other Stories (Toronto: Oxford, 1940), pp. 99-101.

[93] Christine Van der Mark, Honey in the Rock (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966), pp. 210-11.

[94] Ross, As For Me and My House, pp. 62 and 73.

[95] Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, pp. 190-91.

[96] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, p. 54.

[97] Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, p. 198.

[98] McCourt, Music at the Close, p. 176.

[99] Laurence, Stone Angel, p. 169.

[100] The Book of Canadian Poetry, p. 348.

[101] Ibid., p. 349.

[102] Ross, As For Me and My House, p. 59.

[103] Ibid., pp. 37-8.

[104] Ibid., p. 54.

[105] Ibid., p. 42.

[106] Ibid., p. 67.

[107] Ibid., p. 74.

[108] Ibid., p. 76.

[109] Ibid., p. 73.

[110] Ibid., p. 62.

[111] Ibid., p. 105.

[112] Ibid., p. 141.

[113] Ibid., p. 142.

[114] Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, p. 3.

[115] Ross, *As For Me and My House*, pp. 180-81.

[116] *A Book of Canadian Stories*, ed., Desmond Pacey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 706.

[117] Ibid., pp. 186-87.

[118] *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, pp. 352-53.

[119] Blondal, *A Candle to Light the Sun*, p. 46.

[120] See above, pp. 37-8.

[121] See above, p. 143.

[122] *A Book of Canadian Stories*, p. 182.

[123] Christine Van der Mark, *In Due Season* (Toronto: Oxford, 1947), p. 10.

[124] Ibid., p. 14.

[125] Ibid., p. 17.

[126] *Thought and Expression*, ed., H. T. Coutts et. al. (1938; rpt., Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1955), pp. 298-99.

[127] R. R. Annett, *Especially Babe* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1942), p. 204.

[128] Ibid., p. 199.

[129] Ibid., p. 9.

[130] Ibid., pp. 214-15.

[131] The Book of Canadian Poetry, p. 349.

[132] Ibid., p. 350.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Lysenko, Westerly Wild, pp. 147-48.

[135] McCourt, Music at the Close, pp. 170-71.

[136] Ibid., pp. 184-87.

[137] Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, pp. 18-19.

[138] Ibid., p. 171.

[139] Ibid., pp. 117-18.

[140] Ibid., p. 211.

[141] Ibid., pp. 295-96.

[142] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, p. 78.

[143] Arthur G. Storey, Prairie Harvest (Toronto: Ryerson, 1959), pp. 162-63.

[144] Van der Mark, In Due Season, pp. 15-16.

[145] Lysenko, Westerly Wild, pp. 6-7.

[146] Ethel Chapman, The Homesteaders (Toronto: Ryerson, 1936), p. 24.

[147] A. F. Menzies, Two Dollars per Year (Grande Prairie, Alta.: Menzies, 1963), pp. 174-77.

[148] Barbara V. Cormack, The House (Toronto: Ryerson, 1955), p. 115.

[149] Ralph Allen, *Peace River Country* (1958; rpt., Winnipeg: Harlequin, 1962), p. 37.

[150] Ibid., p. 192.

[151] Ibid., p. 19.

[152] See above, pp. 134-35.

[153] Kirkconnell, *The Flying Bull*, pp. 95-108.

[154] *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, p. 354.

[155] Ross, *As For Me and My House*, p. 109.

[156] Kroetsch, *The Words of My Roaring*, p. 74.

[157] Ibid., p. 210.

[158] This was a recurring joke on the prairies at the time. See Max Braithwaite, *Why Shoot the Teacher*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964), p. 85.

[159] Storey, *Prairie Harvest*, p. 163.

[160] Kroetsch, *The Words of My Roaring*, pp. 80-81.

[161] Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, p. 118.

[162] *Poetry of Our Time*, ed., Louis Dudek (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), p. 241.

[163] Saunders, *Horizontal World*, p. 25.

[164] Blondal, *A Candle to Light the Sun*, pp. 9-10.

[165] Sometimes titled "Soliloquy."

[166] *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, ed., A. J. M. Smith (Toronto: Oxford, 1960), p. 322.

[167] Hugo McPherson, "Fiction 1940-1960," *Literary History of Canada*, ed., Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 706.

[168] We find the situation explored in McCourt's Music at the Close, Roy's The Tin Flute, Birney's Down the Long Table, MacLennan's Two Solitudes and The Watch that Ends the Night, Ringuet's Thirty Acres.

[169] Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, pp. 65-6.

[170] Ibid., p. 171.

[171] Chapman, The Homesteaders, p. 1.

[172] Canadian Forum, February, 1938, p. 387.

[173] Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, p. 57.

[174] McCourt, Music at the Close, p. 164.

[175] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, p. 61.

[176] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[177] The Book of Canadian Poetry, p. 352.

[178] Chapman, The Homesteaders, p. 21.

[179] Lysenko, Westerly Wild, pp. 147-48.

[180] McCourt, Music at the Close, pp. 177-78.

[181] Ibid., p. 183.

[182] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, pp. 188-89.

[183] Queen's Quarterly, Vol. 48, Spring, 1941, p. 17.

[184] Lysenko, Westerly Wild, pp. 210-11.

[185] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, pp. 188-89.

[186] Ibid., p. 202.

[187] Ibid., p. 213.

[188] Ibid., pp. 206-7.

[189] Saunders, *Horizontal World*, pp. 26-27.

N O T E S

Chapter IV

[1] Quoted from a personal letter in my possession.

[2] From Souvenir of Saskatchewan Variety Night, Canada '72 Lecture Series, October 10th, 1972, Museum of Natural History.

[3] Robert Collins, "My Saskatchewan Boyhood," Reader's Digest, September, 1970, Vol. 97, No. 581, p. 27.

[4] Chatelaine, Vol. 46, No. 10, October, 1973, p. 99.

[5] Harry Boyle, The Great Canadian Novel (Toronto: Doubleday, 1972), p. 259.

[6] Ibid., p. 256.

[7] Ibid., p. 126.

[8] Ann Henry, Laugh, Baby, Laugh, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p. 187.

[9] A. B. Hodgetts, Decisive Decades (Canada: Nelson, 1960), p. 6.

[10] James Gray, Men Against the Desert (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1967), dust jacket.

[11] For further information see The History of Rolling Hills (No publisher, n.d.)

[12] Gray, Men Against the Desert, pp. 27-28.

[13] Clara Hoffer and F. H. Kahan, Land of Hope (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1960), pp. 141-42.

[14] Ibid., p. 148.

[15] Ibid., p. 157.

[16] Ethel Kirk Grayson, Unbind the Sheaves (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1964), p. 122.

[17] Ibid., p. 131.

[18] Ibid., p. 133.

[19] Heather Gilead, The Maple Leaf for Quite a While (London: Dent, 1967), p. 3.

[20] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[21] Ibid., p. 45.

[22] Andrew King, Pen, Paper and Printing Ink (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1970), p. 120.

[23] Braithwaite, Why Shoot the Teacher, p. 104.

[24] Ibid., p. 123.

[25] Ibid., p. 55-56.

[26] Ibid., p. 124.

[27] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[28] Ibid., pp. 156-57.

[29] Ibid., pp. 77-78.

[30] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[31] Max Braithwaite, Never Sleep Three in a Bed (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 216.

[32] Ibid., p. 217.

[33] James Gray, The Winter Years (Toronto: MacMillan, 1966), p. 6.

[34] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[35] Ibid., p. 14.

[36] Ibid., p. 34.

[37] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[38] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[39] Ibid., p. 52.

[40] Ibid., pp. 55-56.

[41] Ibid., pp. 175-76.

[42] Ibid., p. 177.

[43] Ibid., pp. 177-78.

[44] Ibid., pp. 178-79.

[45] Ibid., p. 178.

[46] Ibid., p. 165.

[47] Ibid., p. 7.

[48] Gray, Men Against the Desert, p. 242.

NOTES

Chapter V

[1] Edward McCourt, Saskatchewan (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 5-7.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

[3] Boyle, The Great Canadian Novel, p. 57.

[4] The Book of Canadian Poetry, p. 348.

[5] Ibid., p. 349.

[6] Ibid., 350.

[7] Margaret Atwood, Survival (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 49.

[8] Ibid., p. 66.

[9] McCourt, Saskatchewan, p. 4.

[10] Ibid., p. 5.

[11] Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World (Vancouver: UBC, 1973), p. xi.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Wallace Stegner, Wolf Willow (1955; rpt., N.Y.: Viking, 1962), p. 8.

[14] McCourt, Saskatchewan, p. 9.

[15] Stegner, Wolf Willow, p. 7.

[16] Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, p. 3.

[17] Ibid., p. 17.

[18] D. G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock (Toronto: U.of T.Press, 1970), p. 37.

[19] Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, p. 3.

[20] Ibid., p. 11.

[21] Ibid., p. 12.

[22] Ibid., p. 30.

[23] Ibid., p. 100.

[24] Ibid., p. 231.

[25] Ibid., p. 264.

[26] Edward McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1949), p. 101.

[27] Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World, p. 113.

[28] John Moss, Patterns of Isolation (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 191.

[29] Kroetsch, The Words of My Roaring, p. 25.

[30] Ibid., p. 54.

[31] Ibid., p. 127.

[32] Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World, p. 134.

[33] Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 87.

[34] Ibid., p. 205.

[35] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[36] Ross, As For Me and My House, p. 75.

[37] Ibid., p. 151.

[38] Ibid., p. 150.

[39] Ibid., p. 107.

[40] Ibid., p. 79-80.

[41] Ibid., p. 87.

[42] Ibid., p. 113.

[43] Ibid., p. 114.

[44] Ibid., p. 117.

[45] Ibid., p. 123.

[46] Ibid., p. 146.

[47] Ibid., p. 159.

[48] Ibid., p. 70.

[49] Ibid., p. 80.

[50] Ibid., p. 75.

[51] Ibid., p. 94.

[52] Ibid., p. 111.

[53] Ibid., p. 36.

[54] Ibid., p. 95.

[55] Ibid., p. 100.

[56] Ibid., p. 69.

[57] Ibid., p. 94.

[58] Ibid., p. 127.

[59] Ibid., p. 20.

[60] Ibid., pp. 95-6.

[61] Ibid., pp. 48-9.

[62] Ibid., p. 113.

[63] Ibid., p. 135.

[64] Ibid., pp. 107-8.

[65] Ibid., p. 23.

[66] Ibid., p. 140.

[67] Ibid., p. 162.

[68] Edward McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto: Ryerson, 1949), p. 95.

[69] Donald Stephens, "Wind, Sun and Dust," Canadian Literature No. 23, Winter, 1965, p. 20.

[70] Ibid., pp. 21-2.

[71] Ross, As For Me and My House, p. vii.

[72] Ibid., p. 91-2.

[73] Ibid., pp. 109-10.

[74] Ibid., p. 155-56.

[75] Ibid., p. 156.

[76] Ibid., pp. 161-62.

[77] Ibid., pp. 74-5.

[78] Ibid., p. 164.

[79] Braithwaite, Never Sleep Three in a Bed, p. 218.

[80] King, Pen, Paper and Printing Ink, p. 113.

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